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ISSUE 221 SEPTEMBER 2024 £5.75

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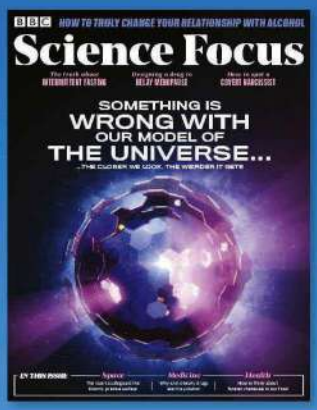


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# Welcome

## Sarah's Top Tip

**Be flexible with dates when looking for deaths – some people lived a long time**

I was tickled pink to find we had not one, but two letters sent in this month about women who lived to 102. What was particularly interesting was how this longevity had confused Debbie Mendonca with her research (**page 8**). Centenarians were rarer in the past than they are today, but there were still those who defied nature and disease to pass that milestone. So, when looking for an elusive death, expand the date range. And if you do find someone who lived to 100, check out the local papers. They loved to celebrate this achievement as we do now.

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What were you doing in 2004? I was busy having my second child and moving to *BBC History Magazine* that year, but I also remember being totally engrossed in a TV series that launched in October looking at celebrities' family trees. It felt like nobody had made television for family historians before, and I was hooked. Now 20 years on, *Who Do You Think You Are?* has become a staple of British broadcasting, encouraging us all to explore our roots – and that's definitely worth celebrating.

On **page 14** I talk shop with Lucy Swingler, the new series producer, and on **page 16** we share the family history community's 20 favourite *WDYTYA?* moments. So many great suggestions were put forward by members of our friendly Facebook Group (turn to **page 71** to see how to join) that it was hard to choose which ones to feature. We're also delighted to have Michael Hurst write for us, who researched what had happened to Vicky McClure's grandfather in Taiwan for her episode (**page 21**), as well as Nicola Morris who carried out the research into Mel C's Irish family (**page 30**).

I hope you will join us in our celebrations. Tell us about the episodes that have meant the most to you, and share your thoughts about the new series with us on social media. Happy viewing!

Sarah


**Sarah Williams** Editor
*sarah.williams@ourmedia.co.uk*


## Contributors

### Michael Hurst MBE

A Canadian expat in Taipei, Michael has spent decades memorialising the POWs in Taiwan (see **page 21**) and helping families uncover the stories of captives.

### Simon Fowler

Simon is a London-based researcher who has written extensively on the First World War, military and naval topics. On **page 38** he explores fascinating RAF combat reports.

### Ruth A Symes

Having worked in education many years ago, historian and writer Ruth has a fascination with the history of education and how it changed the lives of our forebears (**page 52**).


COVER IMAGE: WALL TO WALL MEDIA

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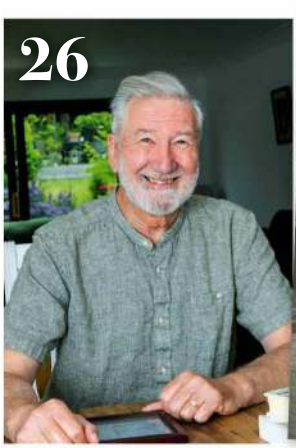

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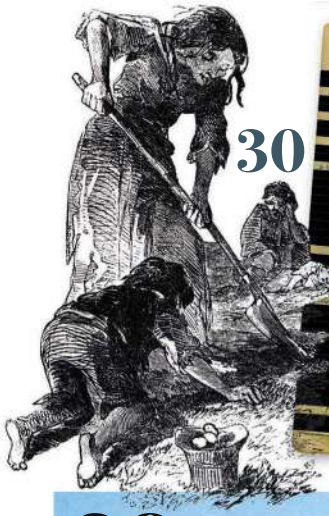

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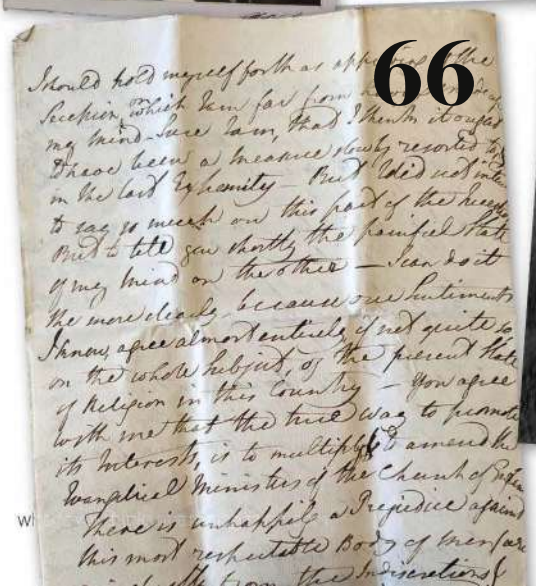

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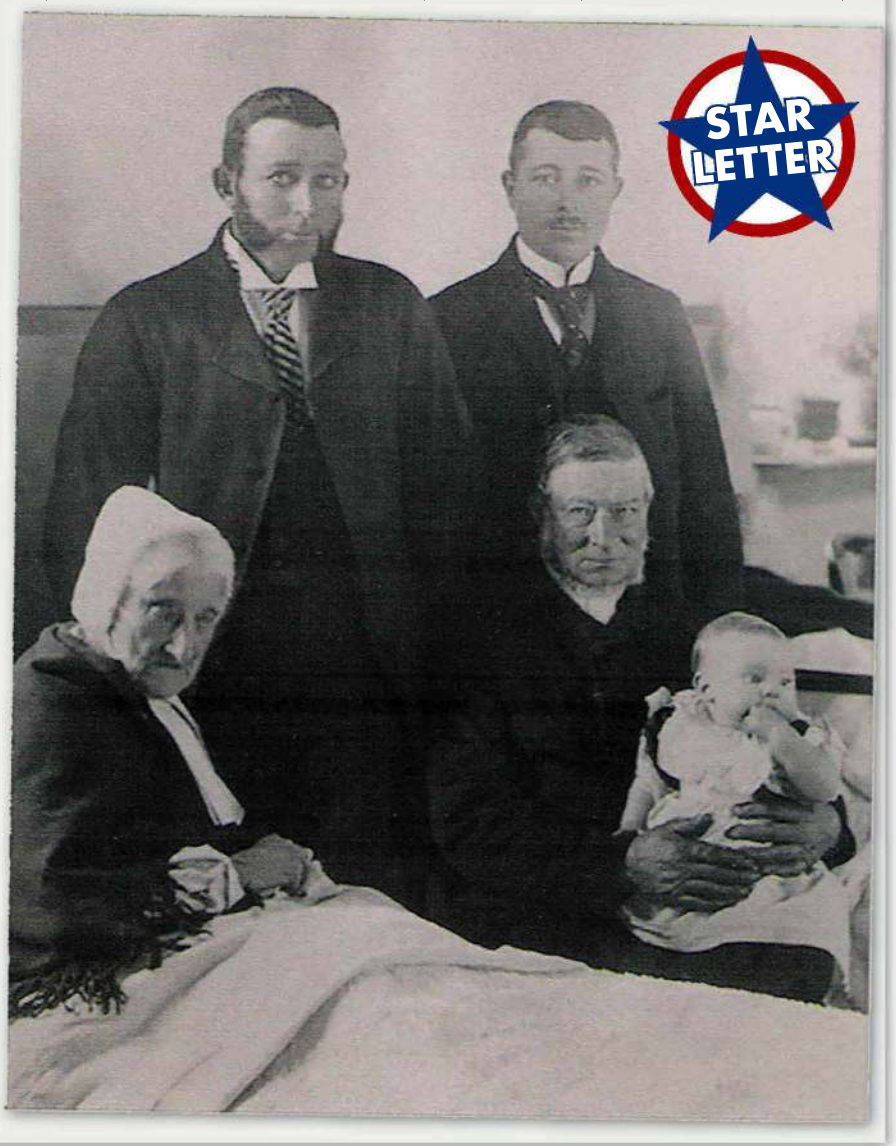
## Extraordinary Centenarian




After reading Gail Dixon's 'Eureka Moment' article in your August issue about a centenarian in Barbara Greenwood's family tree, I thought I'd send a photo of the extraordinary centenarian in my tree, Harriet Betts. Harriet was baptised on 14 July 1797 in Deal, Kent, and died on 28 February 1900 also in Deal. So not only was she a centenarian but her life spanned three centuries including the whole of the 1800s and Queen Victoria's reign.

Born Harriet Epsley, she was the ninth of 10 children and married Edward Betts on 10 January 1830. She is photographed here shortly after the birth of her great great grandson George Colin Betts completing five generations of the family.

In the photograph there is Harriet, my 3x great grandmother; her son Richard Atherden Betts, my great great grandfather; Richard Atherden Betts, my great grandfather; my great uncle George Edward Betts (who was the eldest of 10 children); and my cousin once removed, the baby, George Colin Betts.

Quite a lot of my relatives still live in Deal, and when the photographer WH Franklin of Deal celebrated 100 years in business this photo was on display in the window. My aunt recognised our relatives (which the photographer's records confirmed), and she had copies made for her brother and sisters. I now have my mother's copy. Interestingly, The National Archives at Kew used this photograph on its website when advertising the 1921 census.

**Alison Burtt, by email**

**Editor Replies What an amazing woman. It's impressive enough to live to 102, but to have spanned three centuries is something else!**

## Faulty Trees

I have just re-read Chloe O'Shea's article "10 Online Family Tree Traps" that you originally printed in your May issue but recently also posted online (**whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine.com/tutorials/family-tree-hints**). She outlines everything that I get so angry about. My tree is private, but there are still many that have been posted by others that are totally wrong. Obviously they have just been copied from other trees without doing any research, hence these errors go on ad infinitum, I have tried on several occasions to make contact to get them corrected, but most do not even bother to reply.

Genealogy is a great pastime/hobby, and is big business these days, but it has also got out of hand as genuine researchers have no control over what has been posted. In my early research I used to like the IGI (International Genealogical Index) created by the Mormons, but then FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) decided to allow researchers to post their trees. The idea of a shared family tree is fine, but it has ended up exactly as Chloe has pointed out, full of errors! All this is taking the pleasure out of a wonderful and rewarding hobby.

On another note, I have done a couple of one-name studies, all hard work and time-consuming, copying and pasting into spreadsheets. How I wish I had had Debbie Kennett's 'Tech Tips' article from the July issue,

"Create a master index of BMDs for a surname". Thanks Debbie. **Bob Shaw, Oldbury, West Midlands.**

Editor Replies **The spread of misinformation from incorrect trees is an annoying problem. I wonder if there is a solution? Any ideas from other readers?**

## Making A Point

I refer to a news article in your February issue that recounts the return of a pen to a relative after it had been confiscated by the Nazis during the Second World War. The pen had belonged to a chemist, Hans-Joachim Bünger, who was consigned to several concentration camps.

The photograph immediately caught my eye because this was not just any old pen, but a pen with a distinctive red band around one end. The pen was developed by the German firm of rOtring, and marketed here in Australia as a 'Rapidograph'. When I started work as a cadet draughtsman, I learnt how to print with a steel nib dipped in black Pelikan ink. However, the Rapidograph soon replaced the nibs and the ink spills were a thing of the past.

The Rapidograph was a very clever idea based on the fountain-pen principle, which drew the ink directly from the bottle into a chamber. The draughtsperson only had to shake the pen and a small plunger allowed the ink to flow into a hollow round metal point and so onto the paper. Over the years, rOtring refined the pen and it is still used today.

It would be interesting to know why Hans had a draughting pen. The fine pointed nib was not suitable as a writing implement. **Peter Attwood, by email**

Hans-Joachim Bünger's pen

AROLSEN ARCHIVES

Editor Replies **How interesting to know that the pen had two stories behind it!**

## A Very Long Line Of First Daughters

Our first grandchild, a girl, has recently arrived. Like her mother she is a first daughter, as was her mother's mother, and her mother's mother's mother… in fact back 10 generations as far as I can track to a birth in 1779. All lived in north-east England, mainly in South Shields.

In my fairly large database I cannot find such a long run in any other female or male lines. Admittedly I've not searched the generations of every past sibling to modern times, and I hit brick walls later than the 1770s.

Are there any readers with similar or longer generation runs? **Ged Parker, Tyne and Wear**

Editor Replies **Congratulations to you and your daughter. I hope she didn't feel too much pressure to produce a girl!**

**Jo Green responded to an article on our website about maiden names (tinyurl.com/wdytya-maiden-names)**
I had one branch that disappeared from East Yorkshire and I found them eventually on the other side of the country in Barrow-in-Furness because of a maiden surname used as a second name.

## Advice To Remember

When I first started doing family research, I would regularly spend the day in St Andrew's House in Edinburgh trawling through the records there. I would often get stuck (still do!), and ask one of the staff for help. I would always listen carefully and take notes, because sometimes you would get a snippet of information that would be very useful for future research. One of those bits of advice was to always check all of the information on a birth, marriage or death record – not just the date, name, address. The other, theoretically less important, stuff could be useful too.

Later, when I was looking at my paternal Thomson line, I called up the death record for my grandad James Thomson. I found that his parents were listed as James Thomson and Robina Buchanan. I searched for my great grandparents' marriage record, but drew a blank.

Next step was to search for a death record for a Robina Thomson née Buchanan, but again there was no match. There was a death record in 1945 for a Robina Thomson, but her marital status was "Single". I almost discarded this but somewhere in my head a voice said, "Always check all of the record." So I did, and that was when I noticed that the person registering the death was Robina's son James Thomson – my grandad's name. In that same column was his signature and address. And that's when the hairs on the back of my neck stood up, because the signature was clearly in my grandad's handwriting and the address was the house where my dad and his brothers grew up.

So my advice is always check all of the information on a birth, marriage or death record.

I later discovered that my great grandparents were actually named James Buchanan and Robina Thomson. But that's another story…
**Jim Thomson, by email**

Three generations of first daughters: very proud grandmother Christine Parker née Hindess with her daughter Eleanor and Eleanor's daughter Sadie

Editor Replies **Excellent advice Jim. The story of your great grandparents sounds intriguing.**

## Falling On Deaf Ears

I agree with John Muir's letter in the July issue. I too have sent correction messages to holders of online trees, and rarely receive thanks or see a correction to the tree. Most tree holders fail to answer the message at all.

When I find a person/persons on an online tree I don't know about, I pop the info into my offline tree, then do a paper trail. If it's wrong then I contact the tree holder, although now I'm more inclined to ignore them. Considering that in a lot of cases I may be a close relative of the people in the tree concerned, one would think my suggestions would be welcome – I always point out my connection. **Maureen Clayson, Stratford-upon-Avon**

**Editor Replies That's a great tip to pop the information into an offline tree first. I do wonder if all Ancestry users see their inbox.**

## History In Our Homes

Thank you so much for the interview with historian Ruth Goodman in the July issue. I share her interest in the minutiae of ordinary lives, which rarely featured in history textbooks when I was at school. Power struggles between the great and the good predominated, and it was easy to lose track of the fact that keeping a roof over their heads and putting food on the table were more pressing concerns to most people. I suspect that these preoccupations, as old as humanity itself, will continue to be its main driving force. **Maggie Cobbett, Ripon, North Yorkshire**

**Editor Replies I agree! Family historians are particularly aware of the importance of looking at the past through the eyes of ordinary people.**

Stuart emailed us these images showing different designs of war-work badges

## Still Alive

I recently helped an adopted woman find her parents. She was born during the Second World War, and I helped the adoptee get a copy of her birth record from the adoption services the navy hospital used.

Her birth mother had joined a navy base in New York as a recruit. I learnt so much about the amazing jobs the women did when the men left to fight. Her birth mother was a master gunnery sergeant, training men who would maintain and shoot from the decks of navy ships.

So, we had a name and could find clues, but navy records couldn't be found following that original adoption document. We did locate the mother's parents, but we couldn't find her or any descendants of her.

After months of searching sites like Find a Grave (**findagrave.com**) I had an epiphany. We were looking for death records, but maybe she was still living. I searched the database at Spokeo (**spokeo.com**). The birth mother is now 102 years young, living in upstate New York and has had no other children. My adoptee is planning to visit her this summer. **Debbie Shepherd Mendonca, by email**

**Editor Replies Who would have thought that we would have two letters about women reaching 102 in the same issue. You have done a great service Debbie.**

**@SheldonKGoodman responded to our article about dance halls (tinyurl.com/wdytya-dance)**
My grandparents met at the Hammersmith Palais just after WW2. My nan said she was a decade younger than she actually was. My grandad only found out when he accidentally opened her pension letter on her 60th birthday in 1975.

## War-Work Badges

In response to Janis King's query regarding the triangular badges worn by munitions workers in the photo published in the 'Letters' section of your July issue, it was a badge given to workers doing essential war work. On the badge the words "On War Service" are stamped. Each badge had a unique number on the back of it to record who it was given to.

Regarding the badge her grandmother Annie is wearing, it is likely to be a similar badge but produced by a different manufacturer as there were a number of different designs. **Stuart Price, Cambridgeshire**

**Editor Replies Thank you for this Stuart. I have forwarded your answer to Janis.**

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# What's On

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## PICK OF THE MONTH

Don't miss a day of talks on Scottish family history

### Scottish Indexes Conference XXV

**7 September**

w **scottishindexes.com/conference.aspx**

Genealogical website Scottish Indexes presents the latest in its series of online conferences with advice for researching your roots in the country. There will be five talks: 'Searching for Ancestors in The Royal Mail Archive' by Susannah Coster; 'Parochial Matters: Parishes, Districts and Counties' by Robert Urquhart; 'An Introduction to the Forfeited Estates Papers in the National Records of Scotland' by Tessa Spencer; 'Scottish Burghs and Trade Incorporations' by regular *WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor Chris Paton; and 'Criminal Ancestors: Piecing Together Their Story from a Variety of Sources' by Emma Maxwell. Each presentation is shown twice to make it accessible to people from different time zones. There will also be a Q&A session. Free, but donations to help keep the conferences going are welcome.

## IN PERSON

### Beneath Our Feet

**Until 22 September**

a The Brampton Museum, Newcastle-under-Lyme

t 01782 619705

w **newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/museum/exhibitions**

This exhibition explores the history of Staffordshire's industries that used resources from its soil, such as coal mining, ironworking and pottery. Free.

### The Battle That Changed England

**16 August**

a Discover Northamptonshire, Rushden Lakes

w **discover-northamptonshire.co.uk/event/talk-the-battle-that-changed-england/**

In this talk Mark Linnell from the Naseby Battlefield Trust explains how the Battle of Naseby played a decisive role in the Civil War. £5.

### Merchant City Women's Heritage Walk

**31 August**

a Starts at Rottenrow, Glasgow

t 0141 550 2267

w **womenslibrary.org.uk/event/merchant-city-womens-heritage-walk-5/**

Hear stories of scandal, vice, radicalism, regeneration and revival on this guided tour. £6 for Friends of Glasgow Women's Library, otherwise £10.

### Heritage Open Days

**6–15 September**

a Various locations in England

w **heritageopendays.org.uk/**

England's annual festival of heritage and culture sees thousands of historic buildings around the country holding events, including behind-the-scenes tours of places not normally open to the public. This year's theme is 'Routes – Networks – Connections'. Free.

### How English And Welsh Records Work: What Is And What Isn't There

**7 September**

a Dartford Science and Technology College

t 01322 527604

w **tinyurl.com/nwkfhs-english-welsh-gandy**

Michael Gandy explains why the records we use in our research were made, who they were made for, and why they don't always provide the answers that we expect. Free to members of North West Kent Family History Society, non-members are asked to make a small donation.

## ONLINE

### Are You Sitting Comfortably? Writing And Telling Your Family History

**Starts 19 August**

w **tinyurl.com/pharos-are-you-sitting**

If you want to turn your research into a book, this five-week Pharos Tutors course from *WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor Janet Few will show you how to start. £58 unassessed or £76 assessed.

### Bells And Bricks (Two Wokingham Industries)

**22 August**

w **berksfhs.org/events/bells-and-bricks-two-wokingham-industries/?occurrence=2024-08-22**

In this talk from Berkshire Family History Society John Harrison discusses Wokingham's history of bell-casting and brickmaking. £4 for members, otherwise £5.

### Was Your Ancestor An Agricultural Labourer?

**31 August**

w **tinyurl.com/sog-was-your-ancestor-ag-lab**

Discover how to trace 'ag lab' ancestors in this one-day course from the Society of Genealogists. £48 for members of the society, £60 for non-members.

### Researching Early Modern English History With Joe Saunders

**2 September**

w **tinyurl.com/ihgs-early-modern-english-joe**

This Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies tutorial tells you how to trace people's lives in England in the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries. £10.

### Refugee Family Stories In The Wiener Holocaust Library's Collections

**4 September**

w **tinyurl.com/wiener-refugee-family-stories**

The UK's leading archive of the Holocaust will reveal some of the stories of refugee families in its collections in this online lunchtime talk. Free.

### Family History: Using Military History Records

**6 September**

w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-tna-using-military**

In this webinar from The National Archives, TNA's head of modern collections Will Butler shares his expert advice for using the military records it holds to trace your ancestors in the Army and Navy before the beginning of the Second World War. Free.

## BOOK AHEAD

Celebrate 25 years of the Families in British India Society

### FIBIS 25 Years Conference

**27–29 September**

a DoubleTree by Hilton Oxford Belfry, Milton Common, Thame

e *membership@fibis.org*

w **fibis.org/25-years-conference**

The Families in British India Society (FIBIS) is turning 25 this year. To celebrate, it's holding a three-day conference, with talks on all aspects of Indian family history, one-on-one sessions and more. Food included. One-day and full booking available. From £75.

# News

**Rosemary Collins** reports on data releases and genealogy news

# £5 million lottery funding for archives announced

**A new £5 million National Lottery Heritage Fund investment in the UK's archives sector has been announced.**

The money has been granted to Archives Revealed, a funding partnership between The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **tinyurl.com/tna-news-arch-rev**) and the charities the Pilgrim Trust (**thepilgrimtrust.org.uk**) and the Wolfson Foundation (**wolfson.org.uk**).

Archives Revealed will give about 160 grants to archives across the UK over the coming three years. The new money will ensure that over five times more funding is delivered in 2024–2027 than was possible in 2020–2023.

The programme will continue to offer Cataloguing Grants of up to £50,000 to create catalogues of important archival collections, and Scoping Grants worth as much as £3,000 to assess under-explored collections and support their development.

In addition, the new money will fund Consortium Grants of up to £150,000 for projects spanning multiple archives and collections that have the potential to create wider regional or thematic impact, plus a new sector-development and training programme for archive professionals and volunteers.

An archivist handles a manuscript at The National Archives. TNA is one of the three partners in Archives Revealed, which is using money from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support archives across the UK

Eilish McGuinness, chief executive of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, said, "Our archives are home to our stories. Records, collections and histories all shine a light on who we are, how we live and what is important to us. I am delighted that National Lottery funding will support Archives Revealed to unlock many more of these stories right across the UK and safeguard them for future generations.

"Our £5 million investment will not only amplify the impact of the fantastic Archives Revealed programme… but will also share skills and knowledge, foster partnerships and build organisational resilience in the sector. All of this is vital for protecting the future of our archives and delivering our vision for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future."

**This generous grant allows Archives Revealed to help more archives**

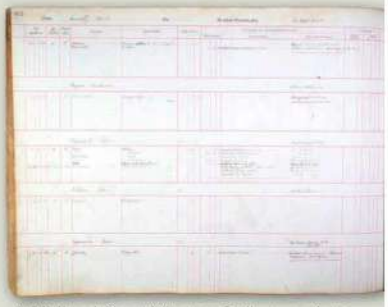
Jeff James, chief executive officer and keeper of TNA, commented on behalf of Archives Revealed, "This is an exciting time to be involved in archives. This generous grant allows Archives Revealed to help more archives in the coming years, to get the very best out of their collections and make them more accessible, demonstrating that archives truly are for everyone. The addition of a new training programme allows us to continue to support the archive sector as a thriving, inclusive sector which places development and professionalism at its heart."

"Archives Revealed will continue to save archival heritage, equip archives for the future through skills and knowledge sharing, and significantly increase the reach of archives to diverse audiences across the UK," he continued.

The news comes at a time when funding for local archives is under threat from widespread shortfalls in local authorities' finances.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## NEWS IN BRIEF



A Midland Great Western Railway register

### Ancestry adds records of Irish railway employees

Family history website Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has added a new collection of 306,881 Irish railway employee records, dating from 1870–1940. Images of the records, which were preserved by the Irish Railway Record Society (**https://irrs.ie**), are included in the collection. The documents list details such as each individual's date of appointment, age when appointed, marital status, occupation, place of employment, wages, any offences for which they were disciplined, and details of injuries and retirements.

Ploughing in Skidby in the early 1900s

### Yorkshire oral history recordings go online

More than 60 oral history recordings from Yorkshire's East Riding have now been made available on Preservica, the East Riding Archives' online catalogue (**https://eastriding.access.preservica.com/**). The recordings were made in 1999–2000 as part of a project relating to the redevelopment of historic Skidby Mill near Beverley. They consist of interviews with older people about life in East Riding during the first half of the 20th century. They were recorded on MiniDiscs, a now obsolete audio format, and were digitised in 2019.

EAST RIDING ARCHIVES / GETTY IMAGES

A police officer comforts a Londoner amidst the damage caused by a V-2 rocket
Inset: Nick Barratt

# All About That Place speakers announced

**The popular free family history event All About That Place is returning in September.**

First launched last year, All About That Place is a collaboration between the Society of Genealogists (**sog.org.uk**), the Society for One-Place Studies (**one-place-studies.org**) and the British Association for Local History (**balh.org.uk**).

It is a programme of 10 days of free short online talks, tasks and activities on the subject of one-place studies.

A one-place study is the study of the history of people and families in their context. This could be a town, a village, a street or even a single building.

This year, All About That Place will run from 27 September to 6 October.

There will be 140 talks. Speakers will include former *Who Do You Think You Are?* researcher Nick Barratt, genealogist and regular *WDYTYA? Magazine* contributor Dave Annal (see our 'Q&A' section on page 41) and crime historian Angela Buckley.

The topics will include Operation Overlord maps, City of London police officers during the Second World War, how to write the perfect research plan, quack doctors, DNA testing, tech demos, murders, mining and Chartists.

Talks will be broadcast on YouTube, and participants will have access to a pop-up Facebook Group.

To get involved in All About That Place, sign up at **subscribepage.com/allaboutthatplace**. For more information, follow #AATP24 on X (**x.com**, formerly Twitter).

## CAN YOU HELP?

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in Northern Ireland (**midandeastantrim.gov.uk**) is appealing for information about four boys depicted in a newspaper photo in 1924. Samuel Beattie, James Nicholl and brothers Fred and Alec Colgan were laying a wreath at the unveiling of Ballymena War Memorial, and had all lost their fathers in the First World War. The council is hoping to find out more about the boys as part of commemorations of the memorial's unveiling in November. They have already heard from their relations, but are keen to hear from anyone else. If you have any information about their families, please contact Dr David Hume on *david.hume@midandeastantrim.gov.uk* or 07391 861746.

This photo of the boys at Ballymena War Memorial was published 100 years ago this November

The Church of St Mary in Cadgwith is now Grade II listed

# Historic England marks RNLI's 200th anniversary

**Heritage organisation Historic England (historicengland.org.uk) has awarded Grade II-listed status to two places associated with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI; rnli.org) as part of the celebrations for the charitable institution's 200th anniversary.**

Listed status was given to the Church of St Mary in Cadgwith, Cornwall, a 19th-century 'tin tabernacle' church whose first vicar, Rev. Henry Vyvyan, was recognised as one of the most distinguished honorary secretaries of the RNLI.

It was also given to the grave monument to James Gall in Barrow Cemetery in Cumbria. Gall was the last survivor of the 1838 wreck of the SS *Forfarshire*, and was one of the people famously rescued by local lighthouse-keeper's daughter Grace Darling.

The RNLI has also added information about more listed sites relating to its history, along with rare photos, to Historic England's website. Members of the public can do the same for places in their area related to the charity at **historicengland.org.uk/listing/missing-pieces/.**

# Findmypast expands its collection of British Home Children records

Family history website Findmypast has added more records to its free British Home Children collection (**findmypast.co.uk/page/british-home-children**). About 100,000 children were sent from Britain to Canada by charitable organisations between 1868 and 1948. The new records are transcription only and consist of an index of some 7,000 burial records for former Home Children; 6,653 records of former Home Children who served in the Second Boer War, the world wars or the Korean War; and 9,050 records of Home Children received at the Hazelbrae Barnardo Home in Ontario between 1883 and 1923.

Children from Barnardo's homes sail from London on the way to Canada in 1920

## Sutton House

Examples of 17th-century paper cutting by young girls have been found at a former school in London (**bit.ly/guardian-sutt**)

## 2,993,285

The number of Lancashire Catholic baptism, marriage and burial records (1762–1913) added to **ancestry.co.uk**

## CL Daniel

The remains of a man killed in the 1921 massacre of African-Americans in Tulsa, Oklahoma, have been identified (**tinyurl.com/cbs-cldaniel**)

## WW1 & WW2

The world wars are the UK public's favourite historical era (**tinyurl.com/mus-heritage-poll**)

## Robert Cecil

More than 20 spies who worked for Elizabeth I's spymaster have been identified (**tinyurl.com/guardian-spymaster**)

Fort Augustus school minutes from 1812

# ScotlandsPeople releases church court records

**The Scottish government's records website ScotlandsPeople (scotlandspeople.gov.uk) has added a collection of nearly 4,000 new volumes of court records from the Church of Scotland, equating to about 290,000 digital images.**

The records complement a collection of more than one million kirk-session records published on the site in 2021.

The new collection of records, which dates from the 1560s to 1900, contains kirk-session records in addition to records of presbyteries, synods and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

They are not indexed by name, but you can browse the records on the ScotlandsPeople Virtual Volumes web page, located at **https://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/virtual-volumes.**

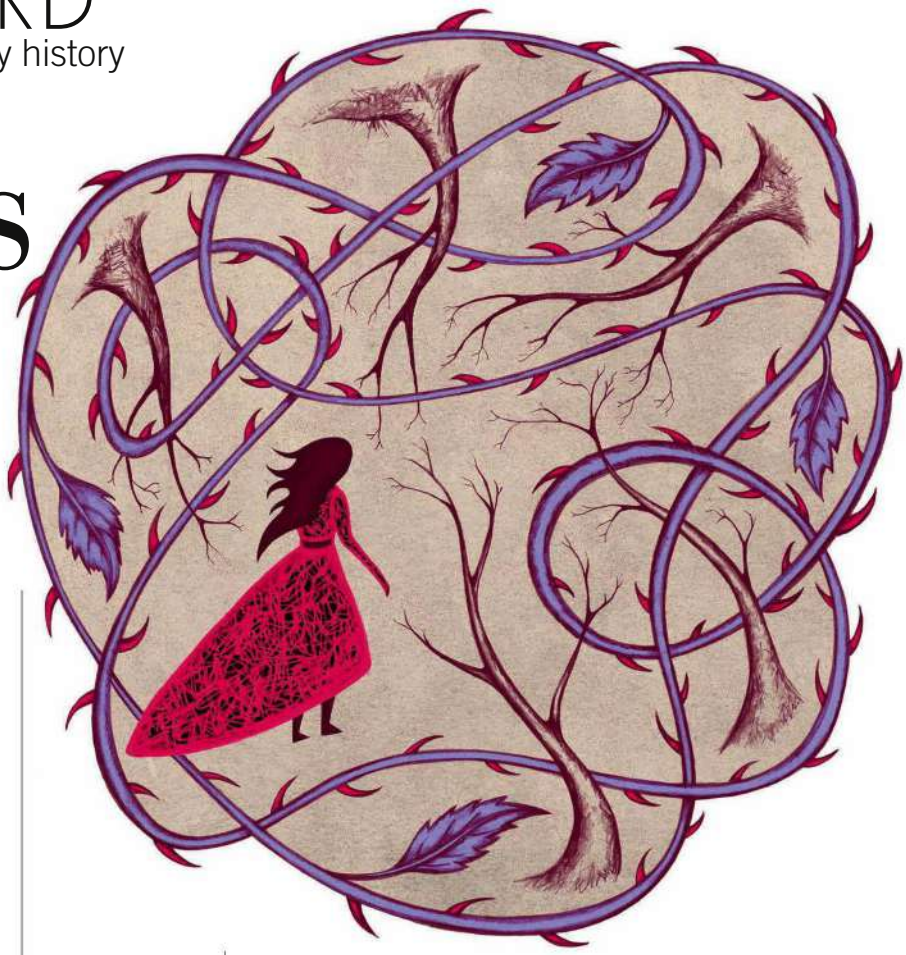
Kirk sessions were low-level courts run by local elders and ministers of the Church of Scotland. They administered parish business such as the payment of poor relief, and disciplining parishioners for 'crimes' such as sex outside marriage, drunkenness and failure to observe the Sabbath. They can be a fascinating resource for family historians tracing their Scottish ancestors.

Researchers can view the records for free and download copies of the pages for two ScotlandsPeople credits. Credits cost 25p each, and are available in batches of 30 or 40.

HISTORIC ENGLAND ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

# Martha's Story

**Alan Crosby** reveals the authorities' harsh treatment of a young orphan in 18th-century Lancashire



Robert Mawdesley was a magistrate, a justice of the peace in mid-Lancashire in the 1720s. His family lived near the village of Mawdesley, from which (many generations earlier) they had taken their surname. Robert and his fellow county magistrates, exclusively male, invariably upper middle class or even more elevated, and without exception practising members of the Church of England, were the key to the maintenance of local law and order. Theirs could be a burdensome task, and if they took their role seriously they had to deal with a huge range of potential and actual problems, to do with crime, social problems and community relations.

Sometimes the harshness of the world, and the plight of individuals, was made real to the magistrates in a way which, even to these superior gentlemen, must have seemed particularly cruel and unjust. According to the records at Lancashire Archives (**lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/**), Robert had one such encounter on 27 January 1725. Leonard Higham, the constable of the nearby township of Eccleston, came to Robert's house. It was customary for magistrates to be visited at home – they rarely had an office or other 'neutral' ground, especially in the country areas such as this. He brought with him a little girl, who had been found "wandering and begging in the Township of Eccleston".

**Martha's lonely wandering took her about 25 miles in total**

She had been "taken up" (or apprehended) by Leonard, and Robert now had to establish her story. She was called Martha Proctor, and she was "betwixt 8 & 9 years". Martha told them that she had been born in Preston, adding that her father had been a tailor who employed several men, although he had died about two years before. We can confirm this from the parish registers: Martha, daughter of James Proctor, was baptised on 5 September 1714 at Preston Parish Church, and James Proctor was buried there on 14 February 1723.

Martha then lived with her widowed mother, but about a month previously her mother also died. She was now an orphan, and the responsibility of the parish and borough of Preston. The overseer of the poor took charge. Her mother was buried "on the parish", but to defray the funeral costs the overseer sold their meagre possessions. He took from Martha two pairs of shoes, some "headclothes", and a "Scarlet [blank space]" – some form of clothing. He then "put her a pair of cloggs on her feet & sent her by his Servant over Ribble and bid her to go into Longton & tarry there". She was led over the River Ribble, which was the borough boundary, and told to go to Longton, a large village about four miles west of Preston: she would be someone else's problem. To emphasise his point, the overseer "threatn'd if she returned to Preston any more he would put her in the House of Correction".

Martha did his bidding, went to Longton, and "tarry'd there about a fortnight". Then, in the freezing winter weather, she "stroll'd through Hoole, Tarleton, Rufforth, Burscough & so to Ormskirk, and from thence wander'd back again into Eccleston". Her lonely wandering took her about 25 miles in total, and we can only surmise how she survived – probably the 'good Christian folk' out of their charity and warmheartedness gave her food, and let her sleep in a barn or outhouse. And we can scarcely imagine what was going through her mind as she trudged in the mud and the frost, shivering and with no idea what lay around the next corner.

The paper trail goes cold at this point. We do not know, with any certainty, what happened to Martha; quite possibly, she has a goodly number of present-day descendants. What I *do* know is that I'd rather have her among my ancestors than the cruel, greedy, grasping, merciless overseer of Preston who sent a young orphan girl on her way 300 years ago.

**ALAN CROSBY** lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION **WWW.SUEGENT.COM**

# BRINGING FAMILY HISTORY TO LIFE

The new series producer for *Who Do You Think You Are?* tells **Sarah Williams** what we can expect from the programme's eagerly awaited 21st series

This year marks the 20th anniversary of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and a new line-up of seven first-class celebrities. To find out more, I met up with the new series producer Lucy Swingler.

Although Lucy may be new to the role of series producer, her connection with *WDYTYA?* goes back a very long way.

"I directed the Stephen Fry episode for the second series in 2006," she reveals. Her role now is very different. "My job is really to be there from the beginning to the end, and support the talented teams who make the films. Along with the development producer we approach celebrities to garner their interest, then the producer and team of researchers evolve the stories. When we go into production I'll work with the director and team to write scripts and set up shoots, be there to troubleshoot and then I'll oversee the edits as the films come together."

## Panning For TV Gold

I ask her at what stage in the production does she realise that they have got the material for a spine-tingling moment. "We normally know in the research stage that something special is going to be revealed, but often these details turn up late in the day, sometimes even during the process of filming. We might see an extra piece of information, or an expert will unearth something that we weren't expecting."

**The celebrities don't know anything in advance. It's all a surprise to them**

Olly Murs follows the trail to Latvia in his episode

Of course, with all the planning in the world, sometimes it's the celebrity's reaction that provides the extra bit of magic. "One of the important things about *WDYTYA?* is that the celebrities don't know anything in advance. It's all a surprise to them," Lucy assures me.

"We may lead them in a particular direction, but we can't 'produce' them to come up with the reaction that we would expect. They react how they want to react, and often it's better than we had anticipated. They might think differently about something, or they will bring in a bit of their personal history that we didn't know about. Sometimes the celebrities make an unexpected connection that we might not have thought of, and provide a different context which is very personal and meaningful for them. We have a few moments like that with *The Only Way is Essex* star Gemma Collins in the upcoming series."

One reaction that the series is famous for is making celebrities cry. Even the hard-nosed broadcaster Jeremy Paxman had to blink away a tear when he learnt about the poverty his family endured in Glasgow in the first episode of Series Two. I explain to Lucy that I now make sure I have a box of tissues to hand when watching *WDYTYA?*

Gemma Collins exchanges the bars of Essex for the joys of county archives

after being caught short with tears running down my face during TV presenter Natasha Kaplinsky's episode in 2007. "Of course there will be tears," Lucy promises.

Even she found herself deeply moved by some of the researchers' discoveries. "Singer–songwriter Olly Murs' episode is just so sad, because it's one of those when if different decisions had been made then it would have been a very different story. And it's about mothers and sons, so if you have got a son, you really feel it.

## Hidden History

"And actor Vicky McClure's story is connected to a bit of history that we seldom hear about, and is so sad and tragic and horrific."

That episode touches on the dark history of the

GETTY IMAGES

Lucy Swingler, the new series producer for *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Far East prisoner of war (FEPOW) camps during the Second World War (see page 21), and I ask Lucy how the producers prepare and support celebrities who have to confront those kinds of dreadful revelations.

"We feel a huge responsibility filming celebrities when they find out information about their ancestors which can be challenging or upsetting, so we think very carefully beforehand about how we will do that. We always make sure the celebrity is given the context by an expert so that they can understand what their ancestor experienced, and we also offer them counselling. In addition we think very carefully about what we might be filming afterwards, and give them time to process things and ensure they are supported."

## Sense Of Belonging

Although the process can be painful, Lucy believes that the celebrities come away with something very special – a new sense of family and belonging. "In comedian and presenter Paddy McGuinness' episode, he literally knew nothing about his family – I don't think he even knew the names of his grandparents. However, he came away with a family history, with people who he didn't know existed, people that he was connected to."

When the celebrities' filming is over they also walk away from the programme with a large folder of research, including family lines not covered in their episode.

Of course, none of this happens by magic, and there is a team that work together to build the family trees. "Our genealogists and researchers are amazing," Lucy enthuses. "They are like detectives. They squirrel away in archives and go to places you wouldn't think about where they might find a mention of someone, and that then leads to somewhere else. Everything is double- or triple-checked; they are incredibly thorough."

*Line of Duty* star Vicky McClure revisits the Second World War

The explosion of online resources has also helped transform the research process. "We can now tackle stories that we probably couldn't have done before," Lucy explains. The digitisation of historic newspapers has been particularly useful. "And it makes the stories that take place overseas much easier when we can access online archives, although we also employ genealogists and researchers in other countries because their local knowledge is invaluable."

One country where they definitely needed local knowledge was Latvia, the setting of Olly Murs' episode. Luckily there was no shortage of documents. "Latvia was part of the USSR [the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics], and they were very good at keeping records," Lucy points out. Some of the research material was extremely sensitive, and the team had to be careful not to accidentally reveal any names on screen.

So why does Lucy think *WDYTYA?* is still going strong 20 years on? "We still get the best, most-loved celebrities on it, and you get to spend an hour with them and see a different side to them," Lucy suggests. She also appreciates the opportunity to shine a light on "obscure, sometimes forgotten, sometimes surprising moments of history" that would not otherwise get shown on TV.

Paddy McGuinness knew very little about his roots before his episode

"Even those big moments in history that you might have seen dozens of times on television, like war stories or the Holocaust, we show in a unique way. You've suddenly got this person who was actually there, and you are seeing it through their eyes."

## Building Characters

The viewers' and the celebrities' engagement with the stories uncovered is paramount: "We always try to build the historical characters, so they are not just another name on the census with an occupation. We uncover details that give an insight into who they were, and what their life was like. When you and the celebrity are invested in them, it brings the history alive in quite a unique way."

One of the important things that *WDYTYA?* has done over the past 20 years is shine a light on family history and encourage thousands to explore their own.

As Lucy says, "All of us can have that history. Just because you're a celebrity, it doesn't mean your history is better. In that way, it's quite democratising. We all have stories we can uncover."

• We reveal 20 favourite *WDYTYA?* moments on page 16, and share the latest details of the new series on page 70.

GETTY IMAGES

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?®

# 20 FAVOURITE MOMENTS

**Sarah Williams** reveals the family history community's best moments from 20 years of *WDYTYA?*

Crack open the bubbly and grab a slice of cake. It's 20 years since the first episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, and that's worth celebrating. When the BBC launched a new TV programme in 2004 exploring the family history of celebrities, they could not have predicted that two decades later it would be such a beloved highlight of our viewing schedules.

It's not just popular in the UK either. The format has seen offshoots in more than a dozen countries including the USA, Australia, Canada, Ireland and the Netherlands. Broadcast originally on BBC Two, the programme leapt to the number-one slot for the channel that year and by the third series had moved to BBC One where it has stayed ever since.

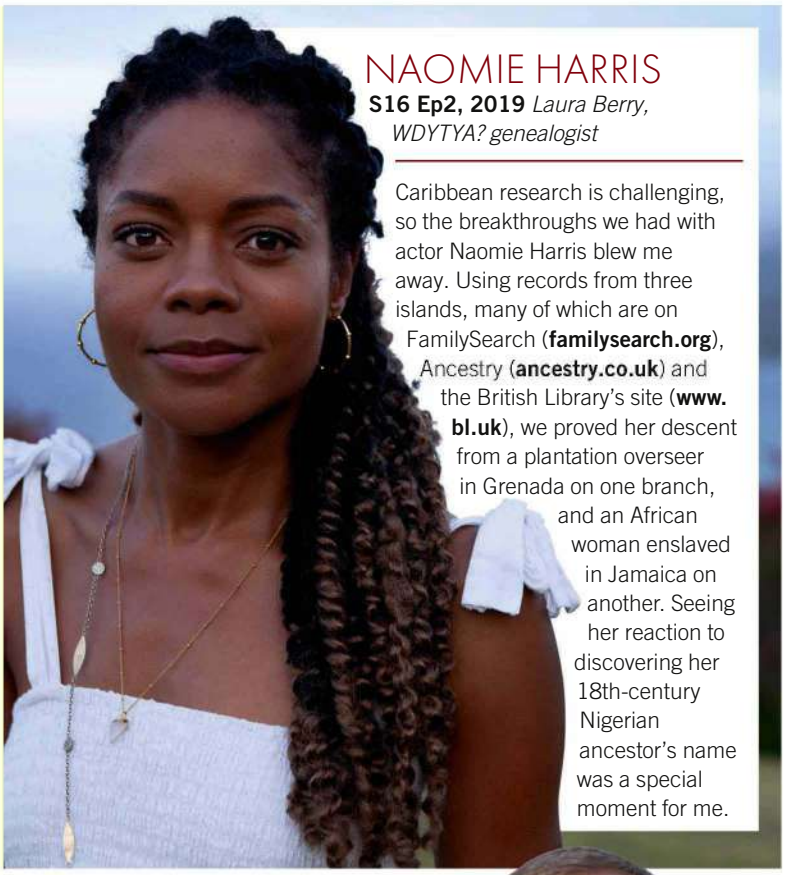
So, we asked a range of people, from those involved in the programme to genealogists and our followers on Facebook (**https://en-gb.facebook.com/whodoyouthinkyouaremagazine/**), to share their favourite memories from the original UK series.

Our call-out initiated a huge response on Facebook and our Facebook Group (**facebook.com/groups/wdytyareadergroup/**), which left us with a dilemma. How do we choose 20 favourite moments from a show that has created more than 170 outstanding episodes?

The moments we have selected all reflect personal choices, but they were all episodes that others had also nominated. It was such fun reading people's posts and being reminded of so many stand-out moments including comedian and author David Mitchell reacting to the scathing will left by his ancestor John Forbes, and stand-up Sarah Millican trying on a diving suit.

There were also lots of nominations for Jerry Springer's and Matt Lucas' episodes, and all those that featured the Holocaust or the First World War.

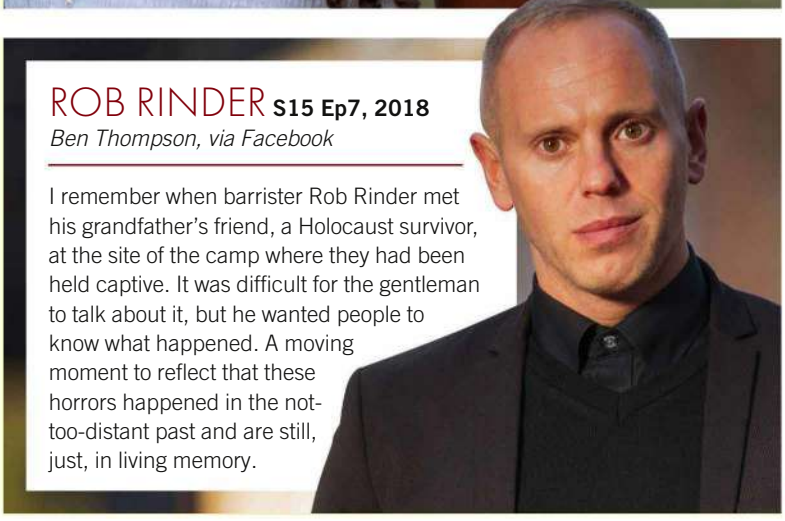
Whatever it is that makes an episode stand out for you, we hope you will enjoy our trip down memory lane. You will be pleased to know that the team at Wall to Wall are already busy working on next year's episodes. Here's to the next 20 years!



## NAOMIE HARRIS

**S16 Ep2, 2019** *Laura Berry, WDYTYA? genealogist*

Caribbean research is challenging, so the breakthroughs we had with actor Naomie Harris blew me away. Using records from three islands, many of which are on FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**), Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and the British Library's site (**www.bl.uk**), we proved her descent from a plantation overseer in Grenada on one branch, and an African woman enslaved in Jamaica on another. Seeing her reaction to discovering her 18th-century Nigerian ancestor's name was a special moment for me.



## ROB RINDER **S15 Ep7, 2018**

*Ben Thompson, via Facebook*

I remember when barrister Rob Rinder met his grandfather's friend, a Holocaust survivor, at the site of the camp where they had been held captive. It was difficult for the gentleman to talk about it, but he wanted people to know what happened. A moving moment to reflect that these horrors happened in the not-too-distant past and are still, just, in living memory.

## OLIVIA COLMAN **S15 Ep2, 2018**

*Rosemary Collins, WDYTYA? Magazine features editor*

I loved actor Olivia Colman's moving quest to find out more about her 3x great grandmother Harriot Slessor, who was born in 19th-century India to a British father and an Indian mother. Olivia's words about Harriot really brought home how our ancestors are closer to us than we might think: "Her grandson is my mum's grandad, which means we've all touched each other's hands throughout time."

## BRIAN BLESSED **S11 Ep2, 2014** *Robbie Bennie, WDYTYA? Magazine art editor*

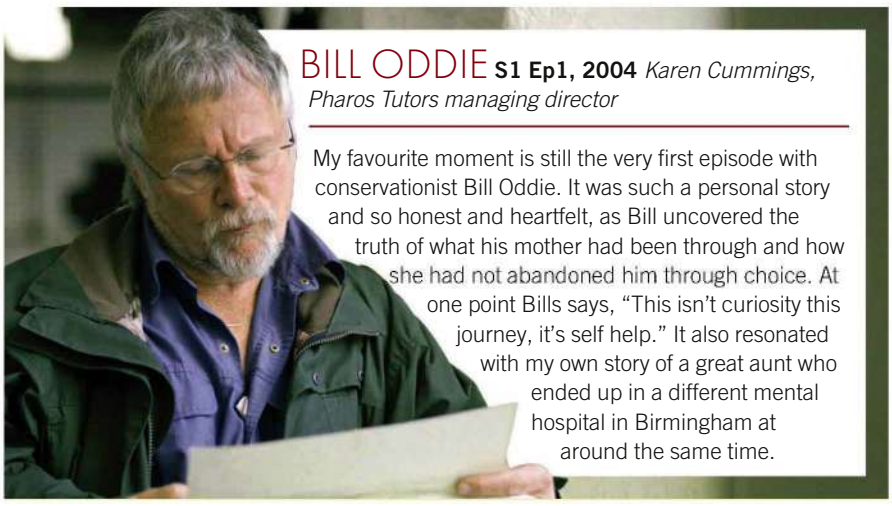
My favourite moment is when actor Brian Blessed was shown a wedding certificate from 1876. At the age of 60 his ancestor Jabez Blessed, who had been separated from his family by the workhouse system, married for a second time, and his brother Charles was a witness. Brian's reaction to the news that they had managed to find each other really moved me.

## NATASHA KAPLINSKY **S4 Ep1, 2007** *Sarah Williams, WDYTYA? Magazine editor*

I loved the moment in presenter Natasha Kaplinsky's episode when her cousin sang a Hebrew prayer in an abandoned synagogue. I think I needed a whole box of tissues after that!

## JOSH WIDDICOMBE **S18 Ep1, 2021** *Liz Yule, Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies director of education*

My favourite moment has to be comedian Josh Widdicombe's episode, where he traced his ancestors back to Henry VIII. I was literally shouting at the screen, "Have you not seen *The Other Boleyn Girl*?!" Hever Castle was a great setting for the viewer to see Josh learn about Tudor history.

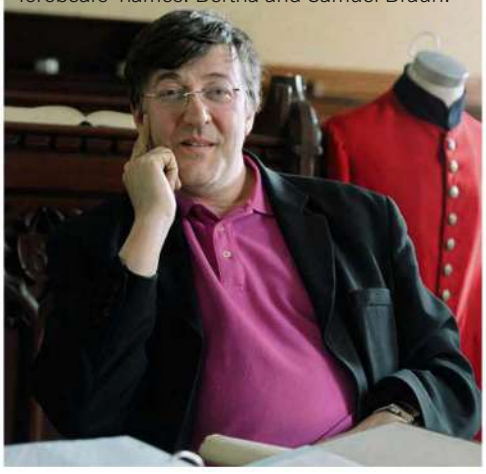


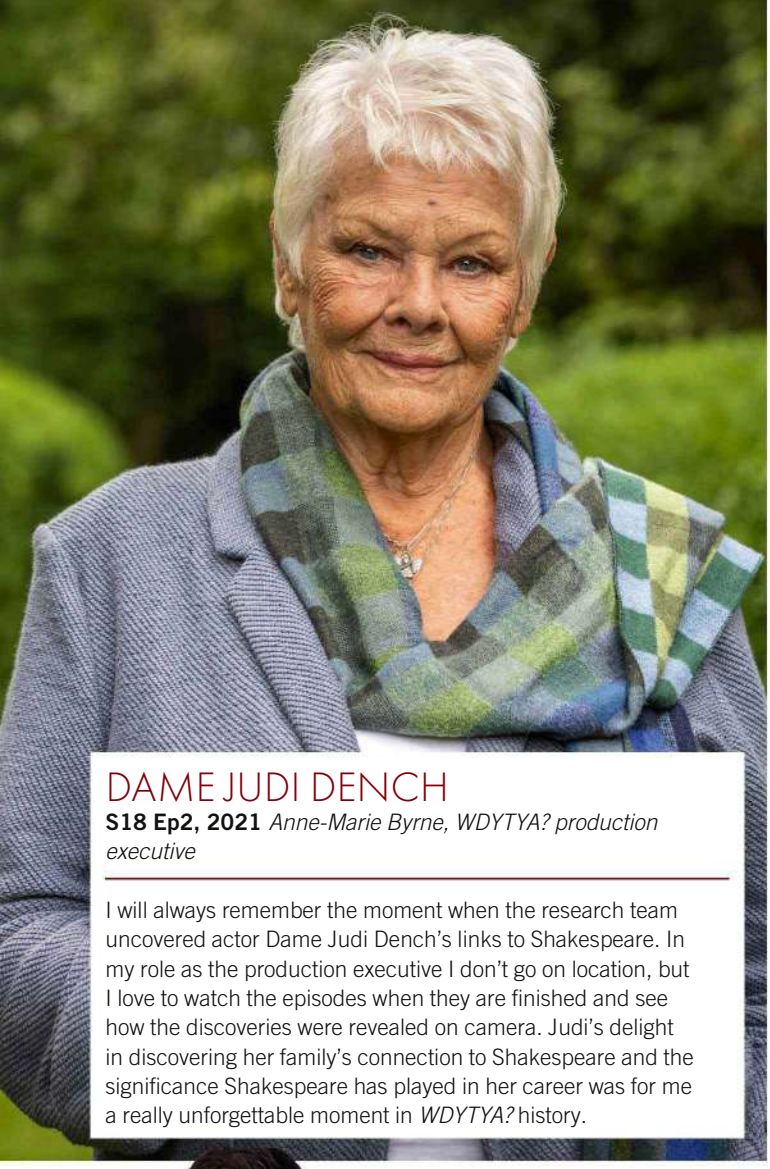
## BILL ODDIE **S1 Ep1, 2004** *Karen Cummings, Pharos Tutors managing director*

My favourite moment is still the very first episode with conservationist Bill Oddie. It was such a personal story and so honest and heartfelt, as Bill uncovered the truth of what his mother had been through and how she had not abandoned him through choice. At one point Bills says, "This isn't curiosity this journey, it's self help." It also resonated with my own story of a great aunt who ended up in a different mental hospital in Birmingham at around the same time.

## STEPHEN FRY **S2 Ep3, 2006** *Lucy Swingler, WDYTYA? producer and director*

In actor Stephen Fry's episode, a special moment for me was when he found a plaque on the house in Vienna where his great grandparents had lived in 1942. The current owner had wanted to commemorate all those who had lived in her building and died in the Holocaust. It was one of those serendipitous moments: we were in the Jewish quarter, and every house in the area would have been home to a Jewish family. It just so happened that this particular house had a plaque listing Stephen's forebears' names: Bertha and Samuel Braun.





## DAME JUDI DENCH

**S18 Ep2, 2021** *Anne-Marie Byrne, WDYTYA? production executive*

I will always remember the moment when the research team uncovered actor Dame Judi Dench's links to Shakespeare. In my role as the production executive I don't go on location, but I love to watch the episodes when they are finished and see how the discoveries were revealed on camera. Judi's delight in discovering her family's connection to Shakespeare and the significance Shakespeare has played in her career was for me a really unforgettable moment in *WDYTYA?* history.

## KEVIN CLIFTON

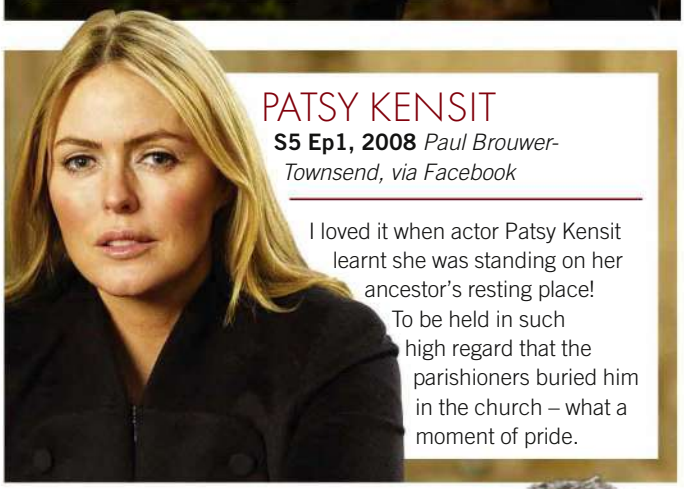
**S20 Ep4, 2023** *Colette Flight, WDYTYA? executive producer*

A moment I found particularly powerful was former *Strictly* dancer Kevin Clifton's reaction to seeing a photo of his Canadian First Nations 5x great grandmother, Nancy, and then discovering that she was also known as Matooskie. Kevin had told us about a rumour of Canadian Indigenous ancestry, possibly connected to a woman called Matooskie, and it was extremely touching to see how moved Kevin was to discover and honour this extraordinary ancestor.

## DANNY DYER

**S13 Ep1, 2016** *Sara Khan, WDYTYA? genealogist*

Connecting actor Danny Dyer to royalty was truly astonishing – a literal rags-to-riches story! We linked his working-class Buttivant family to landed gentry, the Gosnolds. They descended from the blue-blooded Tollemaches, gateway ancestors to the Cromwells and Plantagenet royalty. It was amazing to see how this discovery changed Danny's idea of himself.



## PATSY KENSIT

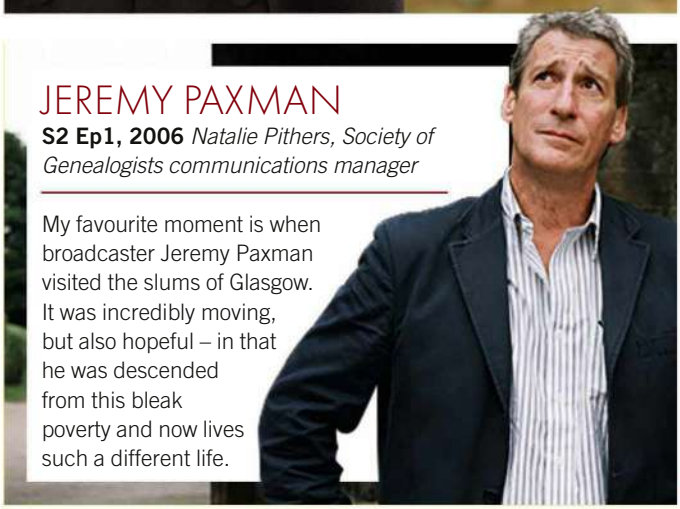
**S5 Ep1, 2008** *Paul Brouwer-Townsend, via Facebook*

I loved it when actor Patsy Kensit learnt she was standing on her ancestor's resting place! To be held in such high regard that the parishioners buried him in the church – what a moment of pride.

## MATTHEW PINSENT

**S4 Ep7, 2007** *Jan Driver, WDYTYA? Magazine Facebook Group member*

I loved it when the rower Matthew Pinsent saw that scroll showing how his line went back from William the Conqueror, through Jesus, King David and ended with God!



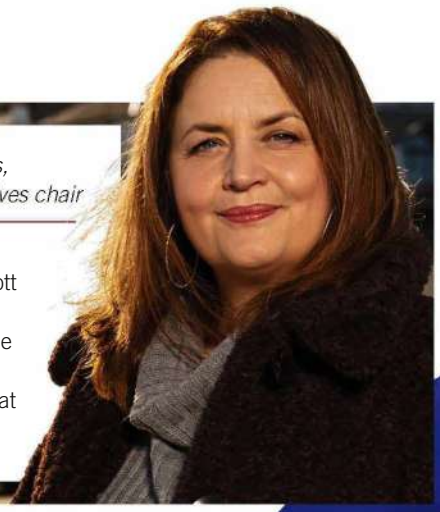
## JEREMY PAXMAN

**S2 Ep1, 2006** *Natalie Pithers, Society of Genealogists communications manager*

My favourite moment is when broadcaster Jeremy Paxman visited the slums of Glasgow. It was incredibly moving, but also hopeful – in that he was descended from this bleak poverty and now lives such a different life.

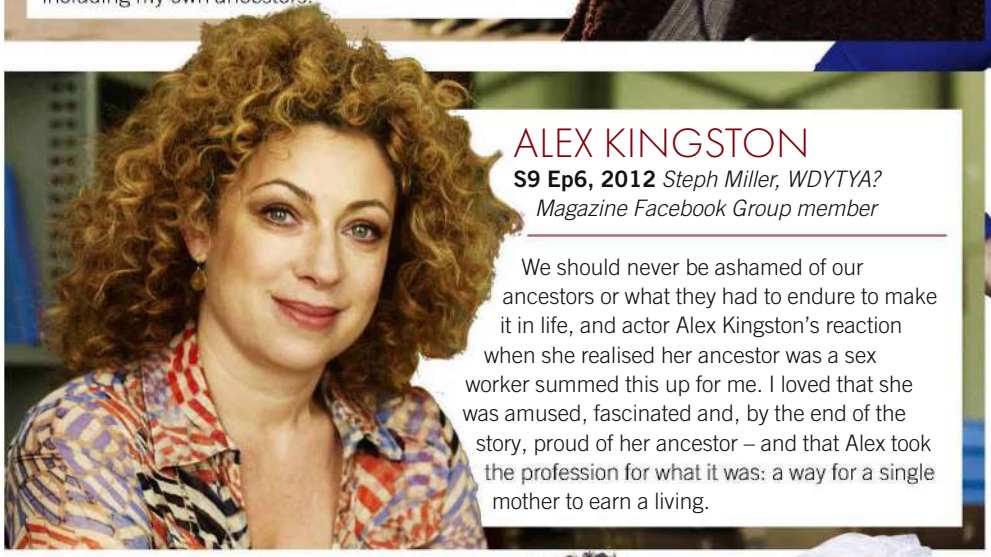
## RUTH JONES **S17 Ep3, 2020** *Gill Thomas, Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives chair*

I've been moved by the many stories of migration, especially in the episodes featuring footballer Alex Scott and comedian Sue Perkins, but my standout moment has to be actor and writer Ruth Jones visiting the home of her master mariner great great grandfather in New Quay, Ceredigion. There are so many small villages that were home to ocean-going mariners in the age of sail, including my own ancestors.



## RUBY WAX **S14 Ep10, 2017** *Tahitia McCabe, Strathclyde Institute for Genealogical Studies head*

Author Ruby Wax's strength and humour was so inspiring as she found out about her family's history of mental illness. I very much appreciated the care and kindness shown by the experts she worked with. The episode was challenging to watch but ultimately uplifting and hopeful, just what you hope for from *WDYTYA?*.



## ALEX KINGSTON **S9 Ep6, 2012** *Steph Miller, WDYTYA? Magazine Facebook Group member*

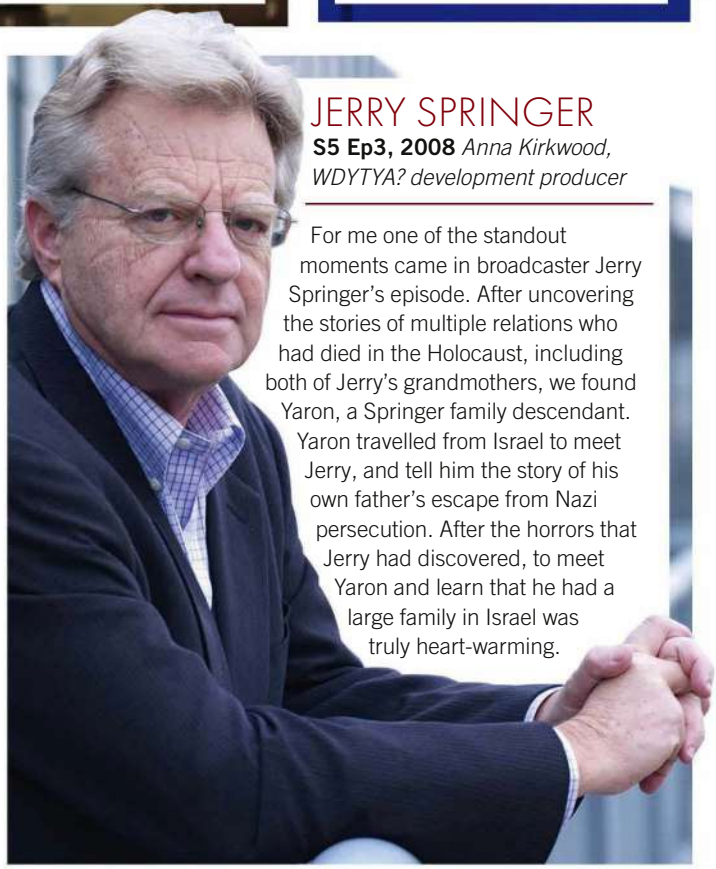
We should never be ashamed of our ancestors or what they had to endure to make it in life, and actor Alex Kingston's reaction when she realised her ancestor was a sex worker summed this up for me. I loved that she was amused, fascinated and, by the end of the story, proud of her ancestor – and that Alex took the profession for what it was: a way for a single mother to earn a living.

## SUE PERKINS **S19 Ep1, 2022** *Charlotte Gardener, via Facebook*

Sue's episode helped me understand what happened to my German grandmother's brother, who was taken by the Nazis due to his learning difficulties. He died in a concentration camp in 1942, the same year as Sue's relative. Seeing her reaction at the end when she realised the church connected to her family was now a boxing gym was a beautiful full-circle moment.

## JACK AND MICHAEL WHITEHALL **S16 Ep3, 2019** *Joanna Hill, via Facebook*

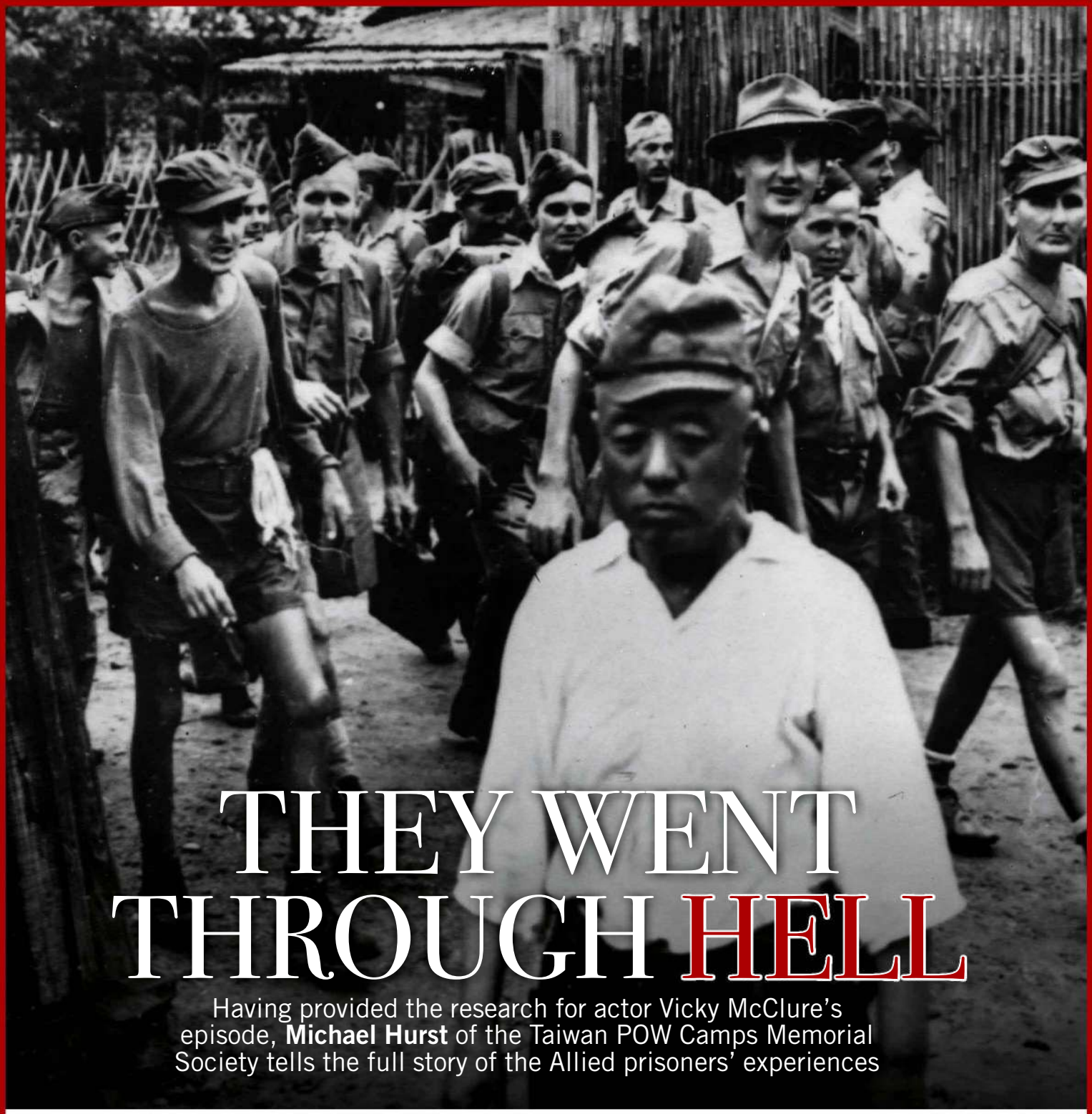
I loved it when comedian Jack Whitehall realised his family were on the wrong side of the Welsh Chartists. It was brilliant!



## JERRY SPRINGER **S5 Ep3, 2008** *Anna Kirkwood, WDYTYA? development producer*

For me one of the standout moments came in broadcaster Jerry Springer's episode. After uncovering the stories of multiple relations who had died in the Holocaust, including both of Jerry's grandmothers, we found Yaron, a Springer family descendant. Yaron travelled from Israel to meet Jerry, and tell him the story of his own father's escape from Nazi persecution. After the horrors that Jerry had discovered, to meet Yaron and learn that he had a large family in Israel was truly heart-warming.

You can see many of these moments on the programme's YouTube channel: **youtube.com/@WhoDoYouThinkYouAre**



# THEY WENT THROUGH HELL

Having provided the research for actor Vicky McClure's episode, **Michael Hurst** of the Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society tells the full story of the Allied prisoners' experiences

Not enough people know that there were Japanese prisoner of war camps in Taiwan during the Second World War. After the surrenders of Hong Kong in December 1941, and Singapore, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines in the spring of 1942, the Japanese began moving their POWs to various locations around their newly acquired empire to be used as slaves for their war effort. Many at first were sent to the infamous Death Railway in Thailand and Burma (now Myanmar).

A Japanese soldier turns away as liberated POWs leave Taihoku Camp No. 6 on Formosa on 6 September 1945

TAIWAN POW CAMPS MEMORIAL SOCIETY

Later Japan transported men on 'hellships' to other destinations like Taiwan, Korea, Borneo, Ambon, Sumatra, Manchuria and Japan itself. The conditions were appalling: the ships were filthy and overcrowded with little food or water, and rampant disease. "My time on the hellship was the worst I experienced as a POW," recalled one survivor, Stan Vickerstaff.

In total there were 16 Japanese POW camps on the island of Taiwan (also known as Formosa) during the war. Japan ran 14 of them; the other two were temporary camps set up after the Japanese surrender to house the freed POWs before evacuation.

The first Allied POWs to arrive in Taiwan came from the Philippines in August 1942. This group consisted of most of the top US officers under General Wainwright and some enlisted men. They arrived at the port of Kaohsiung (Takao) and then were sent on to Karenko Camp at Hualien on Taiwan's east coast. They were later transferred to Shirakawa Camp in the summer of 1943. Shortly after this, the first prison ship from Singapore arrived at Kaohsiung with General ▶

▶ Percival and all of the senior officers and generals of the British, Australian and Dutch forces. They were accompanied by the governor of Singapore and other civilian officials from Malaya, the Straits Settlements and Sumatra. Most were sent to Karenko Camp, while some of the enlisted men remained at Heito Camp near Pingtung.

In mid-September, more Americans arrived from the Philippines – the officers were sent to Karenko and about 300 others went to Taichu Camp south of Taichung. In November two more groups of British POWs arrived from Singapore. One group of 500 landed at Kaohsiung – 200 went to Heito Camp and 300 replaced the Americans who had been at Taichu and were being sent on to Japan. The other group of 1,100 landed at Keelung, and of these 575 went to the main POW Camp No. 6 in Taihoku (Taipei), and the others to Kinkaseki (Jinguashi).

In December more Americans came from the Philippines, and in February 1943 a large group of British, Dutch and Australians arrived from Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. By this time there were more than 4,000 Allied POWs on the island. It is a little-known fact that the highest-ranking and most famous British, Australian, Dutch and US officers, as well as civilian officials from all of the Asian colonies conquered by the Japanese, were held in Taiwan.

In all of the camps the men had to work as slaves surviving on small amounts of low-quality food. Many died of starvation and disease brought about by the lack of proper food and vitamins. The Japanese also withheld medical supplies, resulting in more deaths.

**The men worked as slaves surviving on small amounts of low-quality food**

### Endless Beatings

Moreover if the men did not perform the required amount of work each day, they were beaten up at the end of their shift. It was hard to complete their quota on starvation rations, so this happened almost every day. Harry Blackham, who was held at Kinkaseki, recalled, "The pain from the beatings was incredible, intensifying what was almost unendurable agony." Others were beaten for no reason at all, and several were beaten to death.

The work that the prisoners did varied between camps. For example, in Kinkaseki – one of the worst camps in all of Asia – they worked down a copper mine, often in temperatures exceeding 40 °C. A number of the prisoners died from accidents and injuries.

In Taichu Camp the men slaved to excavate a flood-diversion channel in the riverbed near the camp. They moved tons of earth and rock by hand in the hot sun, with little rest or water.

At Heito Camp, the POWs had the back-breaking job of clearing rocks and stones from a dried-up river bed so that sugar cane could be planted, and they also worked in the cane fields and the sugar factory. Men died of sunstroke, and also malaria which was rampant in this camp.

In Taihoku Camp prisoners slaved to create a man-made lake and memorial 'victory' park dedicated to the early Japanese conquests in Asia. They also grew vegetables to supply the Japanese army garrison, and some later

## Remembering The FEPOWs

Michael explains the mission of the Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society, and its achievements around the world

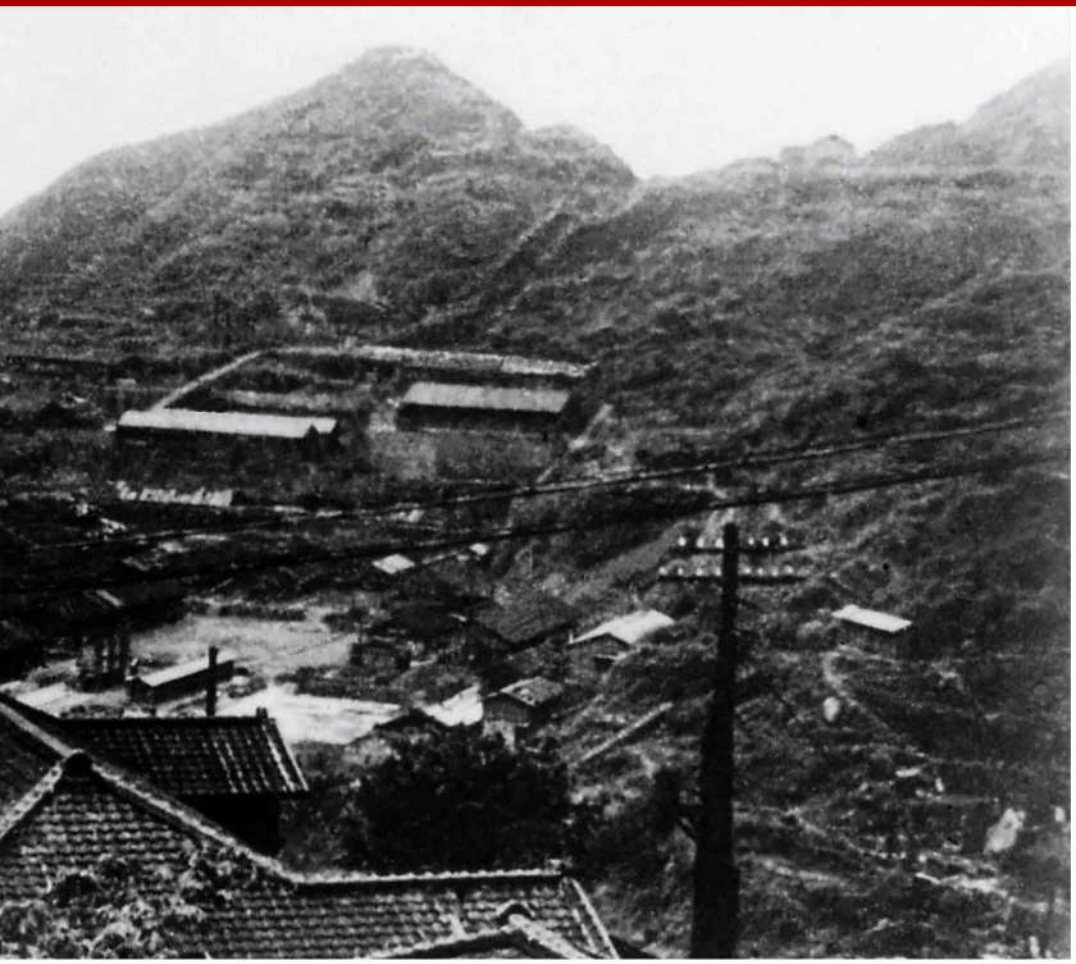
The park include a bronze sculpture of two FEPOWs supporting each other in front of the memorial wall

The work of the Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society began in early 1997. Since then research into the story of the 16 former Japanese POW camps on Taiwan has been conducted and shared with the world, and 15 memorials have been erected at various former camp sites across the island, as well as two in the UK and one in Hawaii. These commemorate the sacrifice and suffering of over 4,350 British, US, Dutch, Australian, Canadian, New Zealand and South African prisoners – more than 800 of whom have now been contacted, so that their stories could be recorded and told.

A major achievement has been the building of the Taiwan Prisoner of War Memorial Park on the site of the infamous Kinkaseki POW Camp in the village of Jinguashi. The park is the only one of its kind in the world dedicated to Far East prisoners of war (FEPOWs), and features a 56-foot black-granite wall on which the 4,363 names of all of the former Taiwan POWs are engraved.

Much of the society's current work involves responding to inquiries from those whose relations were POWs. Readers can get in touch via the online form at **www.powtaiwan.org/contact.php**.

TAIWAN POW CAMPS MEMORIAL SOCIETY



A photo of Kinkaseki POW Camp, taken in 1946 by the War Crimes Investigation Team

worked in the railway and bus-repair shops in the city.

Over the next two years many men were moved between camps. This largely occurred in the case of Kinkaseki. When the men became too sick and weak to work in the mine any longer, they were moved to other camps to recover, although many never did. POWs were transferred to Kinkaseki from the camps at Taihoku, Taichu and Heito to replace the lost miners.

## The End Nears

In autumn 1944 the Japanese were trying to move as many POWs from Singapore and the Philippines to Japan as possible in order to get them away from the advancing Allied forces, and also so they could be used as slaves in Japanese factories, mines and shipyards to replace the men who had gone overseas to fight.

During these months the US and British navies had gained superiority and their submarines were sinking most of the Japanese convoys – many of which carried Allied POWs in unmarked freight ships. More than 21,000 POWs died when their ships were torpedoed or bombed. In October and November 1944, many ships were sunk and some of the POWs who survived were held for a few months in temporary camps in Douliou and Yuanlin. Later in January 1945, those POWs were sent on other ships to Japan.

In February 1945, 701 POWs from camps all over the island were sent to the southern Japanese island of Kyushu and worked in coal mines. There, they finished out the war until the surrender of Japan. This left about 1,300 POWs on Taiwan at war's end.

In early September the Allies came into Keelung, and all of the remaining POWs were subsequently evacuated by sea or air. John Pelly, a Royal Navy lieutenant who was involved in the evacuation, said, "Pictures of Belsen Camp were nothing when compared to these men – too weak to even lift a fleshless arm – it was a ghastly sight."

The POWs were all taken to Manila in the Philippines for medical treatment and care, and when they were well enough and transportation could be arranged, returned to their home countries.

Many struggled to cope with life back home, but gradually most of them learnt to live with their painful memories. Now all of us, including their descendants like Vicky McClure, need to remember these brave men as they deserve to be remembered.

Michael Hurst MBE is founder and director of the Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society (**www.powtaiwan.org**)

## Resources

**Take your research further**

### BOOKS

*Never Forgotten: The story of the Japanese Prisoner of War Camps in Taiwan During World War II*
**Michael Hurst MBE**
*Mei-Hua Publishing, 2020*
The only book that tells the full story of all 16 Japanese POW camps in Taiwan, and the lives of their internees, is available from the Taiwan POW Camps Memorial Society (see the details below).

*Kinkaseki – One Day at a Time, 2nd Edition*
**Arthur Titherington**
*Covos Day Books, 2000*
This is probably the best book on the Kinkaseki and Kukutsu camps, written by a former internee.

### MUSEUM

THE THAILAND-BURMA RAILWAY CENTRE
a **73 Jaokannun Road, BanNua, Amphoe Muang, Kanchanaburi 71000, Thailand**
e *admin@tbrconline.com*
w **www.tbrconline.com/**
This museum presents the history of the Thailand–Burma Railway, and holds extensive archives.

### WEBSITES

TAIWAN POW CAMPS MEMORIAL SOCIETY
w **www.powtaiwan.org**
The society offers help to those researching the Japanese POW camps in Taiwan, and the lives of their internees. Its website is full of valuable information.

HONG KONG WAR DIARY
w **hongkongwardiary.com/hkwdhome.html**
The site covers the fate of the men captured in the fall of Hong Kong in 1941, and their experiences as POWs of the Japanese.

ALLIED POWS UNDER THE JAPANESE
w **mansell.com/pow-index.html**
This huge site has many details of individual prisoners and Japanese camps in locations all across Asia.

TAIWAN POW CAMPS MEMORIAL SOCIETY

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

# 'I've Found A Naval Hero, Poisoned Brothers And A Link To The *Rocket*'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Paul Fitton has spent four decades researching his tree and uncovered amazing stories that bring his relations back to life, says **Claire Vaughan**

A Merchant Navy captain and weather forecaster, who saved passengers' lives with his quick thinking; an engineer who played a key role in the launch of a ground-breaking locomotive; a soldier who survived a massacre in the Anglo-Zulu War (1879); and the mysterious poisonings of two young brothers – retired civil servant Paul Fitton has found them all on his family tree.

Paul, who lives in Orpington, Greater London, is now an events organiser for friendly society the Oddfellows (**www.oddfellows.co.uk**), and enthrals audiences with tales of his amazing ancestors.

He began his research 42 years ago, prompted by the stories his mum told him. "After marrying, my great aunt went to live in Chile in 1893. She and my grandmother corresponded for 50 years. Jorge, my second cousin, was the Chilean mines minister under General Augusto Pinochet during the 1980s."

Once he started digging, Paul uncovered more mining links in his grandmother's family.

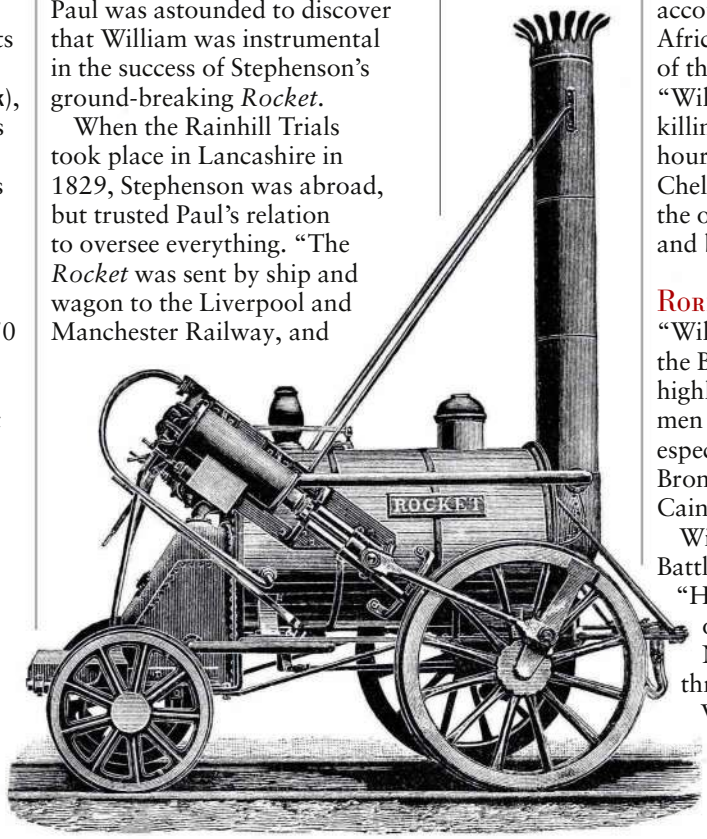
"About 10 years ago, I was researching the Hutchinsons online, and found my 3x great uncle William Hutchinson."

Born in 1795 in north-east England, William was a mining engineer, as were several others in his family. Researching further, Paul gradually realised that he had helped to revolutionise rail travel.

William was the works manager and chief engineer of Robert Stephenson's factory in Newcastle, the city's largest employer. "He was responsible for coordinating the design, ordering of metals to fashion the making of parts, and building of the early steam locomotives." Paul was astounded to discover that William was instrumental in the success of Stephenson's ground-breaking *Rocket*.

**William was the works manager and chief engineer of Robert Stephenson's factory**

When the Rainhill Trials took place in Lancashire in 1829, Stephenson was abroad, but trusted Paul's relation to oversee everything. "The *Rocket* was sent by ship and wagon to the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, and rebuilt." Crowds an estimated 15,000-strong attended the three-day trials, where the engine achieved a new land-speed record. Stephenson called William "the Oracle", and he became a partner in the firm.




William Hutchinson, Paul's 3x great uncle, was involved in the launch of the *Rocket* in 1829

UNP/IAN STRATTON / GETTY IMAGES

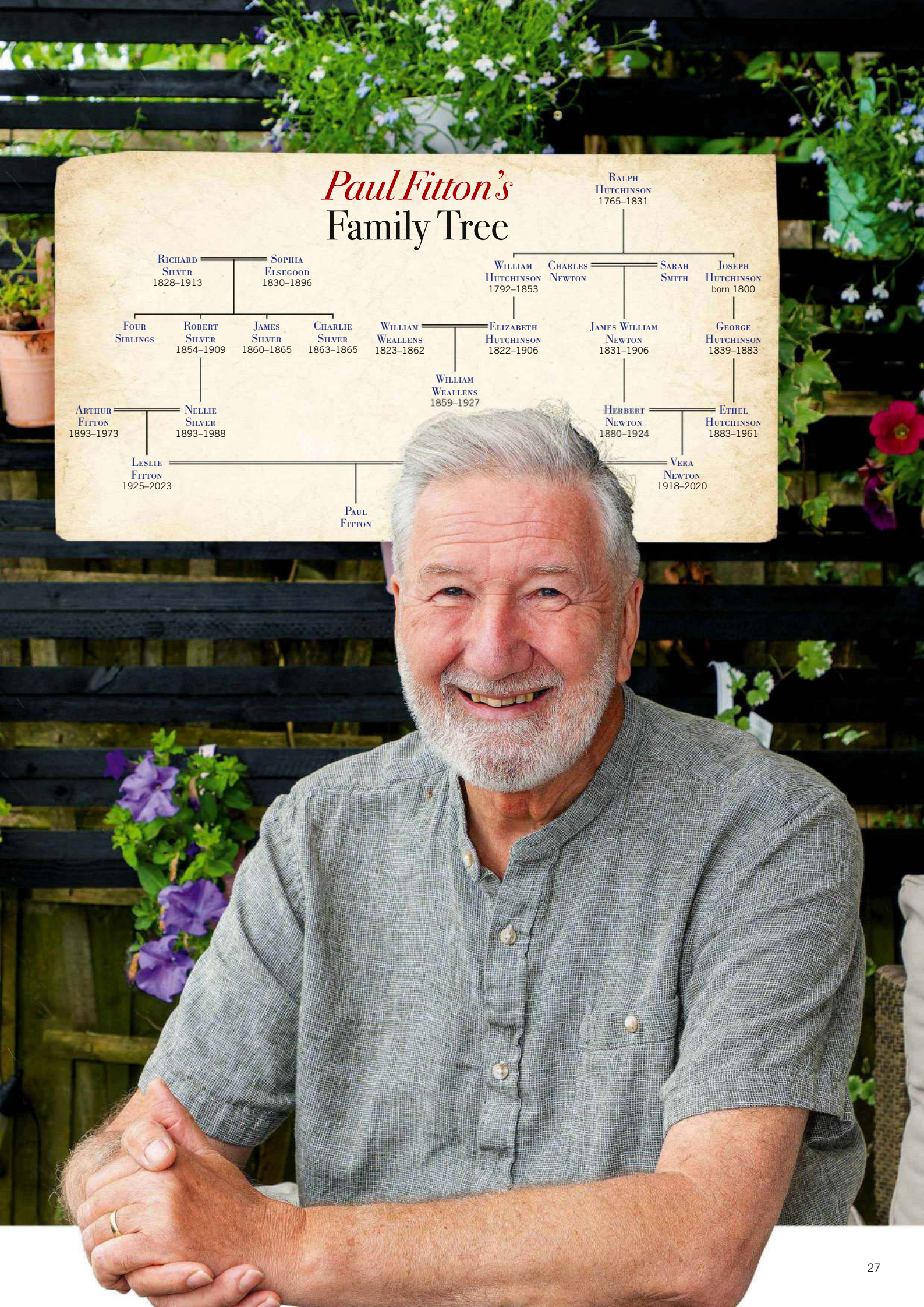
Half a century later his grandson William Weallens, born in Newcastle in 1859, had his own story to tell with a miraculous escape during the Anglo-Zulu War. "A lieutenant in the Army, he wrote accounts of his time serving in Africa." These include details of the massacre at Isandlwana. "William wasn't there when the killing happened; he was on a 24-hour scouting mission under Lord Chelmsford's command. He and the other soldiers returned later and buried their dead comrades.

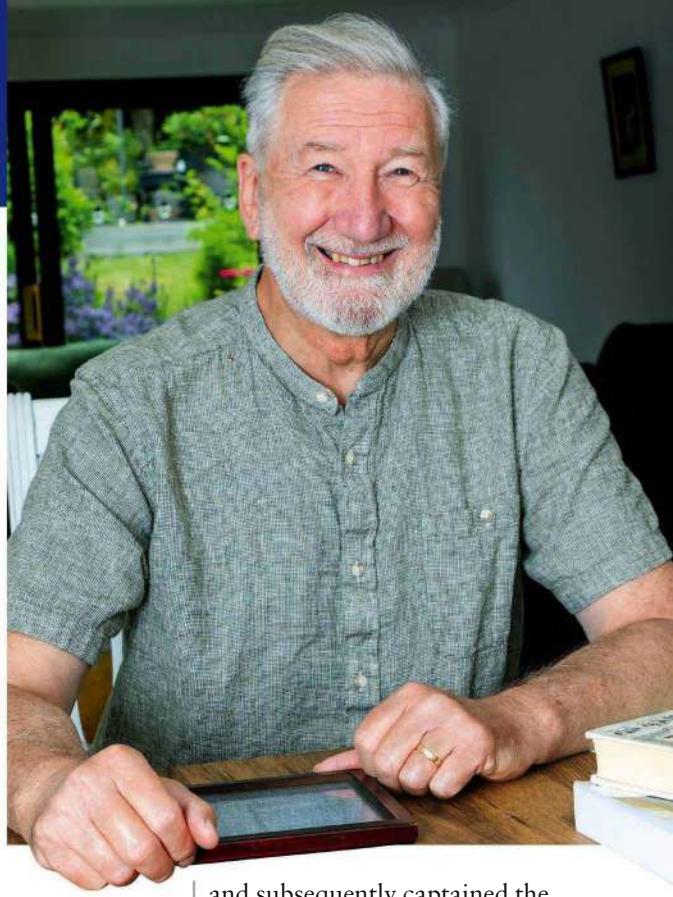
## Rorke's Drift Remembered

"William also wrote about the Battle of Rorke's Drift, highlighting the bravery of the men defending the hospital especially Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead VC, played by Michael Caine in the 1964 film *Zulu*."

William was also present at the Battle of Ulundi, the Zulu capital. "He later attended the burial of the Prince Imperial Louis Napoléon, heir to the French throne, who died there."

William was part of the party that presented the recovered Regimental Colours of the 24th Regiment of Foot to ▶


Paul Fitton's
Family Tree
Ralph Hutchinson 1765–1831
Richard Silver 1828–1913
Sophia Elsegood 1830–1896
William Hutchinson 1792–1853
Charles Newton
Sarah Smith
Joseph Hutchinson born 1800
Four Siblings
Robert Silver 1854–1909
James Silver 1860–1865
Charlie Silver 1863–1865
William Weallens 1823–1862
Elizabeth Hutchinson 1822–1906
James William Newton 1831–1906
George Hutchinson 1839–1883
William Weallens 1859–1927
Arthur Fitton 1893–1973
Nellie Silver 1893–1988
Herbert Newton 1880–1924
Ethel Hutchinson 1883–1961
Leslie Fitton 1925–2023
Vera Newton 1918–2020
Paul Fitton



"All of our ancestors were people living their lives, just the same as everyone today," says Paul

Queen Victoria, and features in a photograph of the occasion.

From a lucky soldier to a double tragedy on Paul's father's side of the family – the deaths of James Silver and his brother Charlie, from suspected arsenic poisoning. "These two young children died within six weeks of each other, which naturally aroused suspicions."

## Arsenic Accusation

On 9 September 1865, the *Norwich Mercury* detailed how the inquest of two-year-old Charlie from Botesdale in Suffolk found that he died from "arsenic, wilfully administered". His mother, Sophia, was cautioned and the inquest was adjourned while the body of his four-year-old brother, James, was exhumed for further examination. On studying the contents of the child's stomach, the coroner found the remains of fungi.

"It had been stated at the previous inquest that the Silver children had eaten mushrooms recently. The doctor said that arsenic and mushroom poisoning had similar symptoms." The inquest ruled that James had died from mushroom poisoning.

Reopening Charlie's inquest, it was agreed that: "The arsenic he ingested was found to have been in a bottle abandoned in the field next to the house by a shepherd who had used the concoction to get rid of ticks on his sheep." The inquest decided that Charlie found a piece of the bottle and put it in his mouth. In a strange twist, "The foreman of the jury at the inquest was the owner of the field and had given the shepherd the bottle of sheep mixture." Sophia was cleared of any involvement.

But the relation who really captured Paul's imagination was his great grandfather Captain James William Newton. "My mother used to talk about his remarkable life. Her parents managed a pub in the early 1900s, and one of the items displayed there was his framed obituary."

The newspaper article revealed that James had been born in 1831, and "commenced his career as a sailor at the age of 19, in the year 1850… and visited many exotic places, including Australia and the west coast of South America. Returning to England in 1855, he took his Mate's Certificate."

James rose rapidly through the ranks. Paul explains, "He gained his Master's Certificate in 1860 and subsequently captained the ill-fated *Beatrice*, which struck a rock off the Danish coast during a heavy gale in November 1861. James beached the vessel to prevent it sinking, then ordered all of the oil the ship was carrying to be poured out onto the heavy sea, which calmed the waves. The crew managed to escape with their lives."

**Captain Newton developed a highly accurate system for predicting storms**

This photo includes Paul's grandparents Ethel and Herbert Newton *(on grass, far left and centre right)* and great grandfather James Newton *(in top hat)*

UNP/IAN STRATTON

However, this wasn't Captain Newton's only brush with danger. In 1871, there was a second disaster and, in the words of the obituary, "but for the coolness and foresight of the deceased it might have been attended by serious consequences".

## Cataclysmic Collision

James was captaining the steamship *Earl Percy* in heavy fog a couple of miles from Tynemouth, on the way from the Tyne to London, when it collided with the *David Burn*, which had stopped to return to port on its trial trip with the owners and about 80 guests on board.

Both ships were badly damaged, but Captain Newton, instead of backing out of the *David Burn* as many commanders would have done in similar circumstances, kept his ship slowly steaming ahead, supporting the *David Burn* and preventing it from sinking

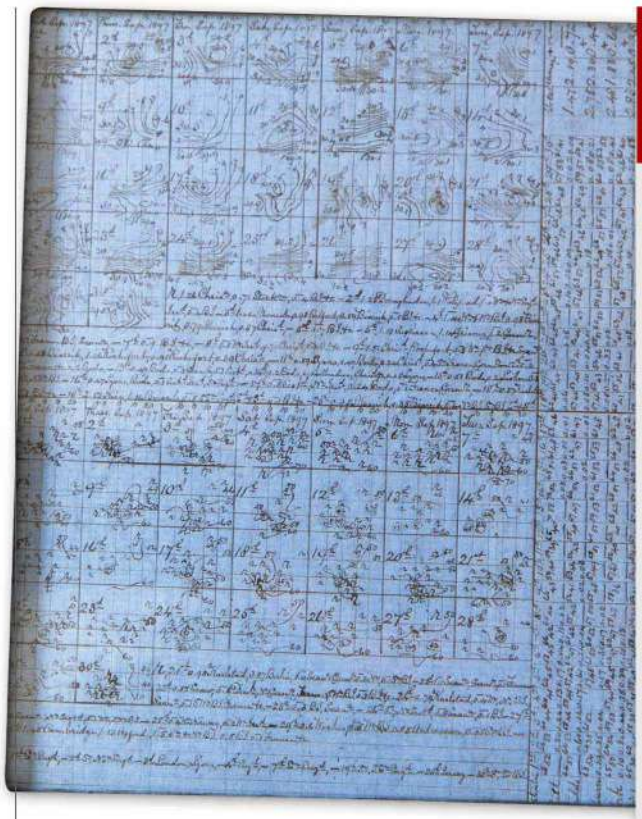
until everyone on board had been rescued. The only casualty was a small dog. Although the *David Burn* was lost, the damage to the *Earl Percy* was repaired.

According to the obituary, after his maritime career James became a publican and ran establishments including the Rising Sun Hotel and Addison Hotel in Newcastle, the European and United States Hotel in North Shields, and the Globe Inn in South Shields

But when Paul uncovered the roots of this remarkable man, they were not at all what he expected. James William Newton was born to Charles and Sarah (née Smith) in Shoreditch, Middlesex. Early in his research, Paul found a possible entry for James in the 1841 census, living at Winchmore Hill Orphanage. Information he found in settlement and other Poor Law records confirmed that this was definitely his ancestor, James' parents having died some time between 1834 and 1837.

Paul used records at The National Archives in Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**) and on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) to trace James' Merchant Navy career. Within Ancestry's collection 'UK and Ireland, Masters and Mates Certificates, 1850–1927', he found scans of his forebear's original certificates.

The ships' records at TNA revealed that James had sailed on the *Castle Eden*, which transported British settlers to New Zealand in 1851; the *Albatross*, which delivered mail to Melbourne, Australia; and also travelled to Callao in Peru, Hong Kong, Philadelphia in the USA, and other far-flung destinations across the globe.



Some of James' meteorological calculations

**TELL YOUR STORY**

**Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

## Fascinated With Forecasting

The newspaper obituary also mentioned Captain Newton's skills as a "weather prophet", a role for which he had "gained more than local fame". During his time at sea, James became fascinated with the weather and – in these early days of forecasting – developed a highly accurate system for predicting storms, which he described in a paper he sent to the Royal Meteorological Society entitled 'The Law of the Winds'. James cited the six biggest gales of the year, each of which he claimed his system had predicted, while the Met Office had failed to forecast any of them.

"Captain Newton maintained meticulous calculations recording wind speed, barometric pressure and temperature." He also had an observatory built on top of one of his pubs, to view the stars.

"His weather reports featured in newspapers worldwide. There are hundreds. Some are right – and some are wrong." One year, he predicted snow in June. "The story was that some drinkers in a local pub paid some boys to knock on Captain Newton's door, and ask him if he wanted the snow cleared from his roof. He had the last laugh because it did, indeed, snow in June – damaging the house of one of the drinkers."

For Paul, it's the stories behind the dates and cold, hard facts that captivate him. "All of our ancestors were people living their lives with ups and downs, just the same as everyone today. I like to add flesh to the bones, and make them real people." And as his Oddfellows talks go to show, he certainly has some relatives with stories worth telling.

A contemporaneous depiction of the *Earl Percy*'s collision

UNP/IAN STRATTON / BRITISH LIBRARY

## Resources

**These resources helped Paul explore his relations' lives**

### British Newspaper Archive

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

Obituaries in newspapers and other publications can provide a rich summary of an ancestor's life. In Captain Newton's case, they revealed that he became a publican after his naval career.

### The Meteorological Office Archives

w **metoffice.gov.uk/research/library-and-archive/archive**

The collection here contains a range of fascinating documents including marine weather logbooks from historic voyages and private weather diaries. Many communications with the Met Office from associates are held in the archives, such as Captain Newton's.

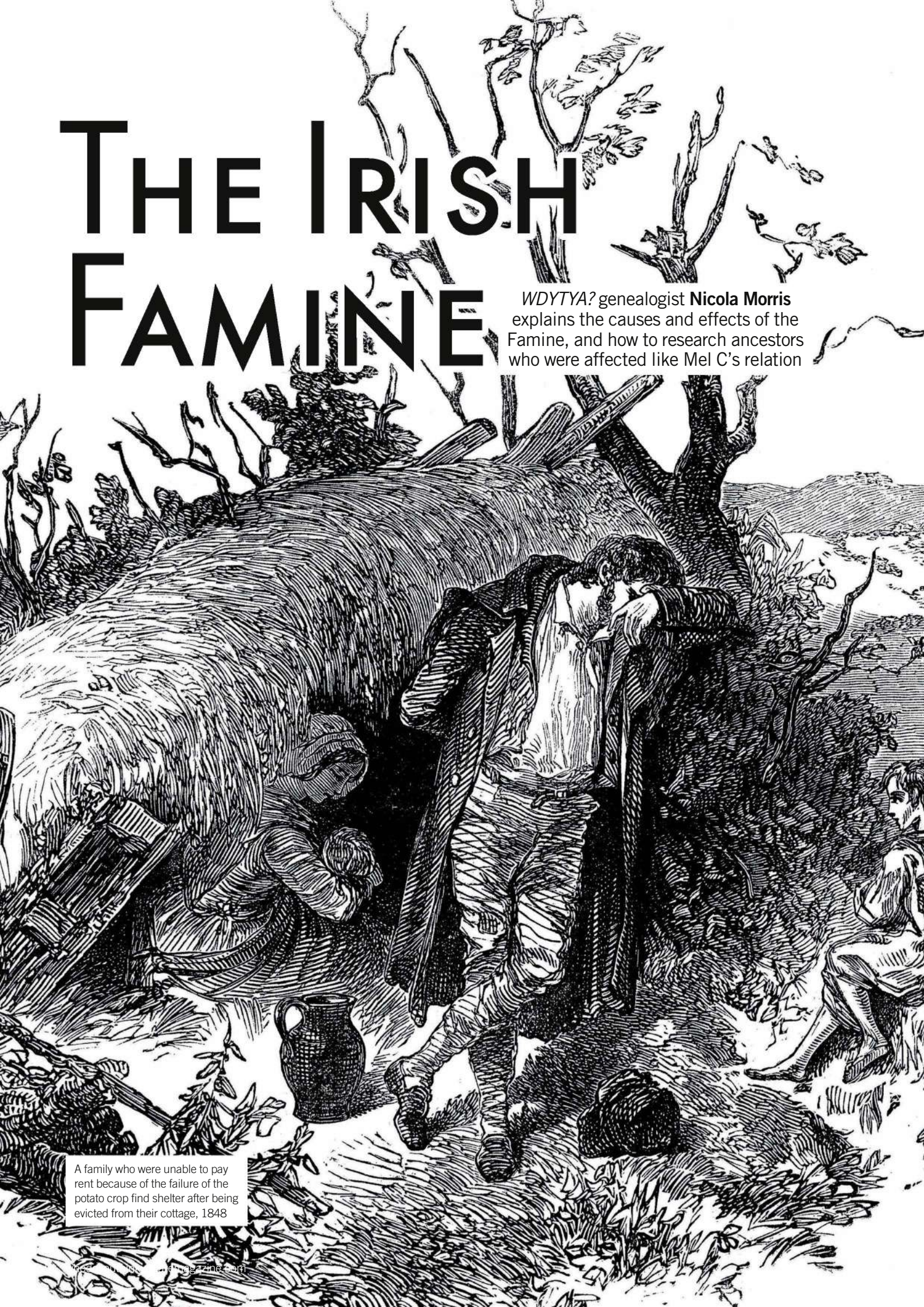
### The National Archives

w **tinyurl.com/MerchantNavyRecordsTNA**

TNA's website includes a very thorough research guide to tracing records of your Merchant Navy ancestor, including ships' records, crew lists, musters and logbooks. Some of these can be accessed via TNA's online catalogue Discovery: **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**.

# The Irish Famine

*WDYTYA?* genealogist **Nicola Morris** explains the causes and effects of the Famine, and how to research ancestors who were affected like Mel C's relation



A family who were unable to pay rent because of the failure of the potato crop find shelter after being evicted from their cottage, 1848

The potato, introduced into Ireland in the last decades of the 16th century, was the superfood of its day. A highly nutritious crop that produced a large yield on low-quality land made it possible for farmers and labouring families to feed themselves from a small holding. From the 18th century the potato became the ubiquitous subsistence crop of the agrarian class in Ireland.

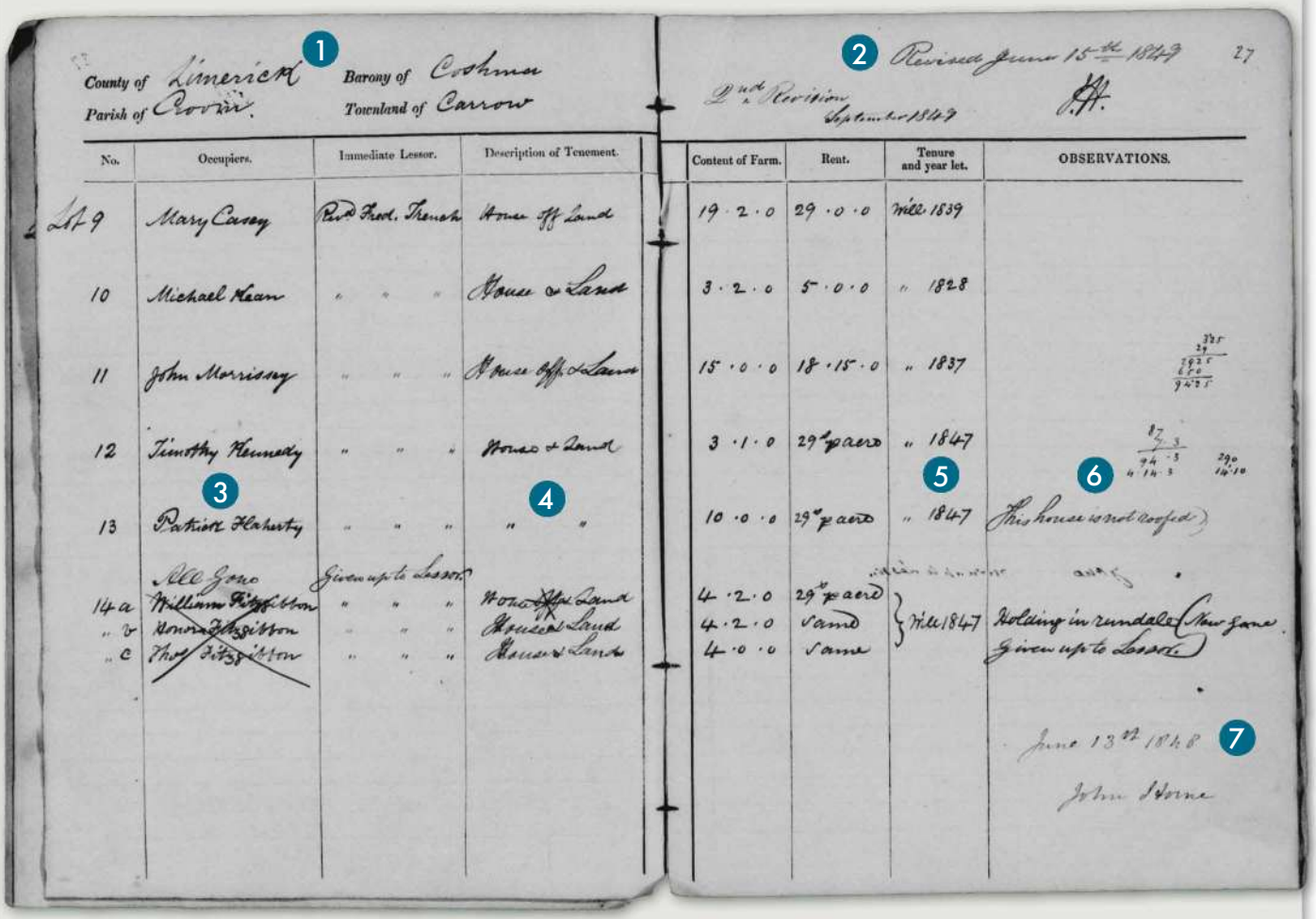
As the Irish population grew, reaching five million by the end of the 18th century and eight million by the time of the 1841 census, many large families, eking out a living on increasingly diminishing land holdings, were entirely reliant on the potato as their only source of food. This was supplemented with milk, and occasionally meat or fish.

## The Arrival Of Blight

In the summer of 1845 a fungus, known as blight, appeared on potato crops in Europe, arriving in Ireland by the autumn. The disease quickly spread across the country, destroying the potato in the fields. In November a Relief Commission was established, tasking police constables and other officials across the country with surveying their local potato crop and reporting on the progress of the blight and the resulting level of

# Tenure Book, 1848

This Valuation Office Tenure Book documents Mel C's ancestor Patrick Flaherty at Carrow during the Great Famine. It is available at the National Archives of Ireland's website (**tinyurl.com/nai-cens-vob**) and Findmypast (**tinyurl.com/fmp-irish-vob**)




**1 Limerick**
The denomination of the land being valued is recorded here, including the townland and the parish.

**2 Revised**
The date(s) of any revisions are given here. Note that revisions were not common, and don't appear in every notebook.

**3 Occupiers**
The names of each occupier and land owner (the "Immediate Lessor") are given.

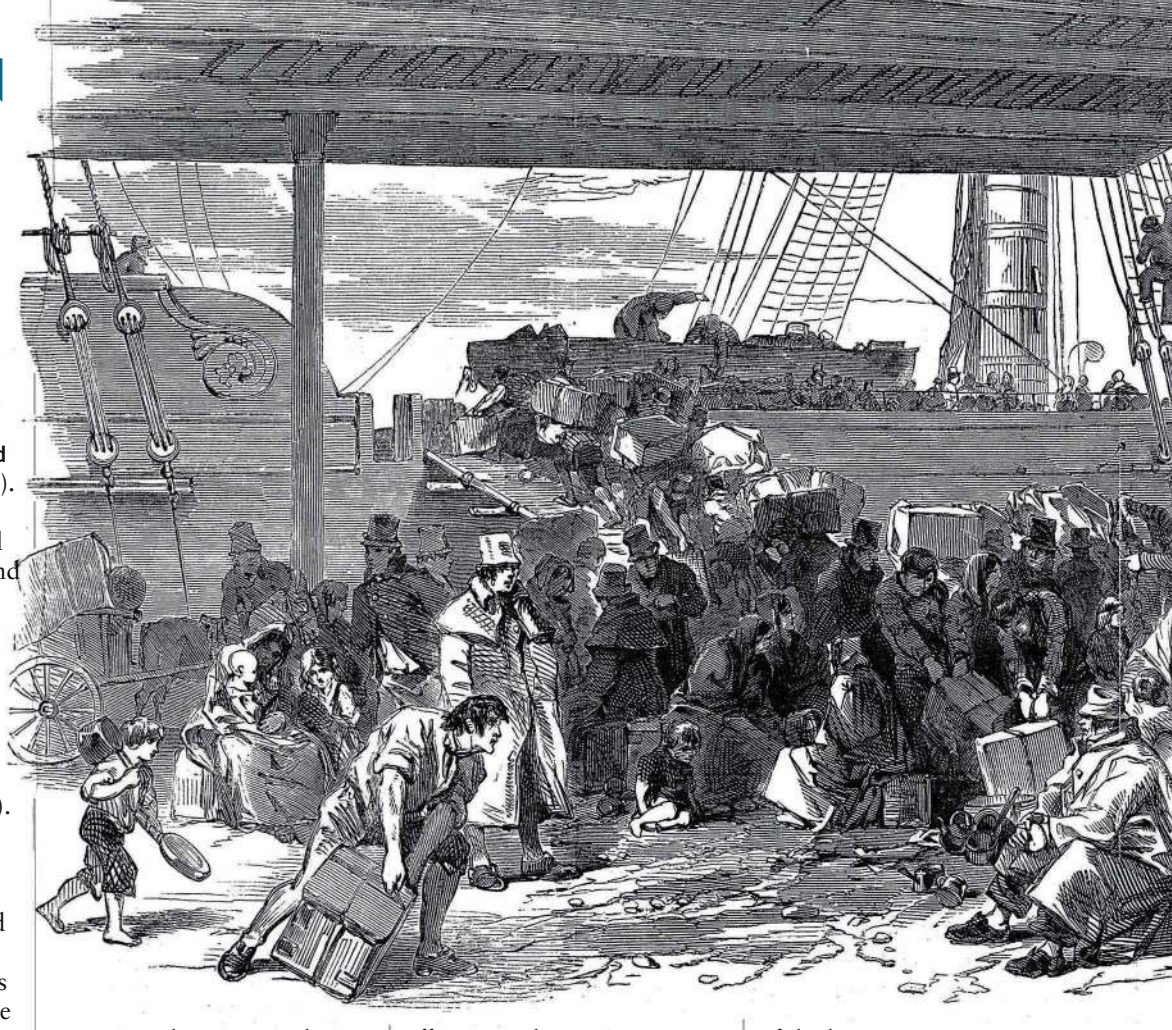
**4 Description Of Tenement**
Brief details are included here.

**5 Tenure**
As well as the rent, the tenure and the year the property was first let are recorded.

**6 Observations**
You may find additional comments here.

**7 Creation Date**
The date that the record was created (in this case 13 June 1848), as with the revision date(s), is not recorded on every page.

GETTY IMAGES



distress. Organised by county, these reports can be found in the National Archives of Ireland (NAI) under reference RLFC (**nationalarchives.ie/search-the-online-catalogue/advanced-search/#!/details/110000065**). By February 1846, the commission had set up local Relief Committees to respond to the impact of the loss of the potato, and committee correspondence is available in Ancestry's collection 'Ireland, Famine Relief Commission Papers, 1844–1847' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1772**). While they only document the names of the committee members, often local landlords, parish priests and ministers, and local donors, the correspondence provides insight into the impact of the burgeoning Famine as well as the local response.

## Desperate Measures

The majority of the Irish population lived in a rural setting, and were entirely dependent on the potato for sustenance. The failure of the first potato crop forced families to purchase food. To purchase food they needed money. Families that could not find paid work sold what they could – fishing nets, farm implements or livestock, or furniture – as a short-term measure to ensure a supply of increasingly expensive food over the winter. But the blight did not just affect a single season; it persisted, season after season, destroying each new crop.

By the winter of 1846/1847 a vast number of the Irish population were facing starvation, and competition for the resources to feed a family was fierce. With nothing left to sell, entire families were found huddled in empty houses, under a pile of rags, starving. When work could be found, often through government public works schemes, the men of the house were given the lion's share of the food available, to sustain them through a working day. This deprivation had a huge impact on the growth and development of infants and young children.

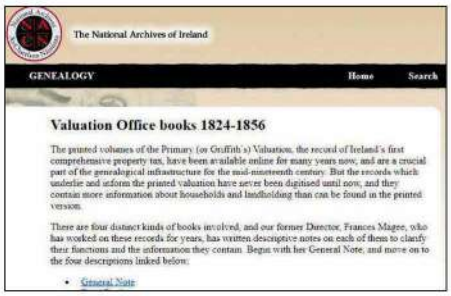
Many starving families took refuge in the recently established, but suddenly overwhelmed, Poor Law Union workhouses, which offered indoor and outdoor relief. Workhouse admission and discharge

### DID YOU KNOW?

During and after the Famine, emigrants were frequently young single people, largely travelling alone – before it, they tended to be family and community groups.

# Tracing Irish Relations In The Mid-19th Century

Nicola explains how you can track down evidence of your Irish family before, during and after the Great Famine

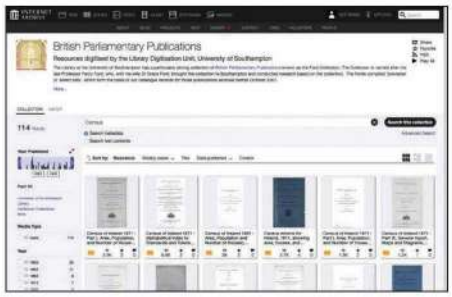



## Step One

Look for kin before and during the Famine in Valuation Office Books (**tinyurl.com/nai-cens-vob**), Tithe Applotment Books (**tinyurl.com/nai-tithe**) and parish registers (Ancestry, Findmypast or Roots Ireland: **rootsireland.ie**).

## Step Two

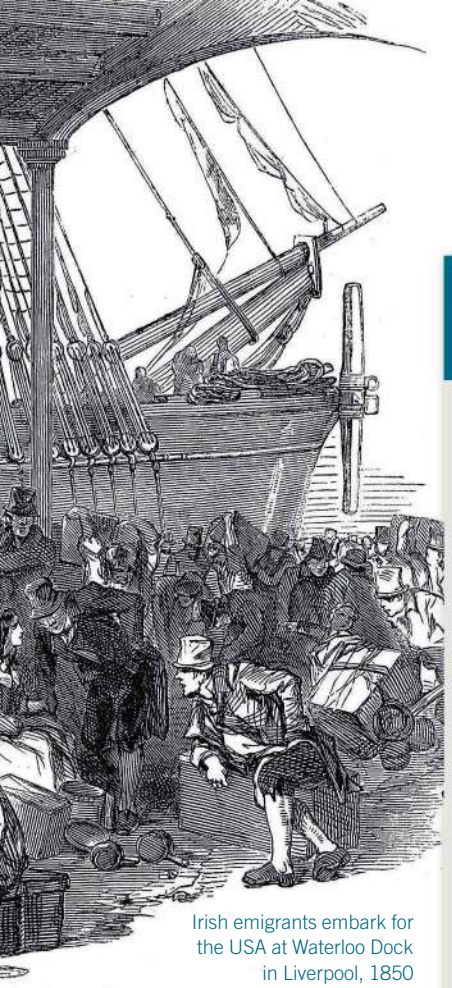
You can search for records of the same family in Griffith's Valuation, which was largely compiled after the Famine, on the government website Ask About Ireland (**askaboutireland.ie**). Did they have to move?




## Step Three

The statistics from the 1841 and 1851 censuses can help you determine the change in population of a townland or parish, possibly due to the Famine. The Internet Archive has the reports at **tinyurl.com/arch-irish-cen**.

GETTY IMAGES



Irish emigrants embark for the USA at Waterloo Dock in Liverpool, 1850

## Patrick Flaherty

**Nicola explains how she researched Mel C's Irish forebear for the new series of *WDYTYA?***

Singer–songwriter Mel C's ancestor Patrick Flaherty was born in Liverpool in 1861 to Patrick Flaherty senior and Catherine Burns. Patrick's baptismal record, from St Anthony's, Liverpool, identified both of his parents, and the 1871 census for England and Wales enumerated older siblings who were all born in Ireland.

Searching the indexed Roman Catholic parish baptismal registers for Ireland found Patrick's oldest sister Maria, who was baptised in Croom, County Limerick, in August 1846, whereas her younger siblings were baptised in the Roman Catholic parish of St Michael's in Limerick City from August 1848. This family moved during the worst of the Great Famine.

Maria's baptismal record provided the family address of Carhue, also known as Carrow, in the civil parish of Croom, and Patrick was found at Carrow in June 1848 in the Valuation Office Books (see the annotated document on page 31). By September 1849 his house was recorded as being without a roof, and Patrick and his family were in Limerick City. They were not documented in Carrow in Griffith's Valuation in December 1851, by which time Patrick and many of his neighbours had departed the townland.

The census enumerated 283 people in Carrow in 1841, but only 34 in 1851 – a very significant change in the population. During the Famine period many landlords took the opportunity to clear their lands of tenants who were unable to pay their rents, and consolidate small holdings into large grazing farms.

registers, minute books and administrative records, if they still survive for the period, are usually held in the local county archive; find out more at Peter Higginbotham's website The Workhouse (**workhouses.org**). Some of this material is available digitally; for example records from Dublin are included in the collection 'Workhouses and Poor Law in Institutions & Organisations in Ireland', which is available on Findmypast (**search.findmypast.ie/search-ireland-records-in-institutions-and-organisations/and_workhouses-and-poor-law**).

### Support From Charities

Charitable organisations sprang up, including soup kitchens. The Irish Church Missionary Society offered soup to the starving Catholic families of the west of Ireland provided they converted to the Protestant faith, the resultant converts being known as 'soupers'. This practice was far less common than is generally believed, and the majority of Protestant (and Quaker) charitable relief offered during the Famine had no strings attached.

The impact of the Famine dramatically changed the landscape of Ireland. Roughly one million people died of fever and starvation, while another million left the country for Britain, Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand in short order. Over the following decades another two million departed, reducing the Irish population to four million. Families also left their lands for urban centres, where there were significantly more employment opportunities.

The Famine's repercussions were worst in the west, and counties like Leitrim, Roscommon and Mayo were the hardest hit. Where there were alternative industries, such as textiles in the north-east and dairy in the south-west, the population fared somewhat better. However, there was not a corner of the island that did not feel the effects of the loss of the potato crop between 1845 and 1849.

Documenting the population during this period is very challenging. While the 1841 and 1851 census returns were destroyed in 1922 in the fire at the Public Record Office in Dublin during the Civil War, the population data gathered for both censuses was included in parliamentary reports, and offers stark insight. Published from 1851 and available on the University of Essex's website Online Historical Population Reports (**histpop.org**), although the site seemed to be offline at the time of writing, and partly on the Internet Archive at **archive.org/details/britishparliamentarypublications?tab=collection&query=Census**, the population statistics for each of

A young girl guards her family's last few possessions after they were evicted during the Famine

An evicted family search for potatoes in a stubble field during the Famine

GETTY IMAGES

the townlands in 1841 and 1851 reveal how many people left the townland over the decade, and how many houses were abandoned.

Famine Distress reports can be found in a special collection within the Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers (CSORP) in the NAI in Dublin (**nationalarchives.ie/our-archives/explore-our-collections/collection/**), with heart-wrenching accounts of the level of deprivation found across the country.

## Tracing Emigrants

Records of emigration during and immediately after the Famine can be ad hoc, and there is no record of travel to Britain. However, Ira A Glazier and Michael Tepper's seven-volume *Famine Immigrants* (Genealogical Publishing, 1983–1986) documents the arrival of the Irish into the Port of New York between 1846 and 1851, and has been indexed at Ancestry, Findmypast and FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**). The publication allows you to easily recognise family groups, which is missing from the online collections.

Some Irish landowners paid for their distressed tenants to emigrate, abandoning land that could no longer sustain them. Some collections of Irish estate papers include records of such assisted emigration.

For example, emigrants from the Fitzwilliam Estate in County Wicklow are documented in emigration books that are held in the National Library of Ireland (**nli.ie**) in Dublin, and have been published online by Jim Rees: **tinyurl.com/fitz-rees.**

Some landed estate papers, such as for the Wandesforde Estate in County Kilkenny, also include letters from tenants seeking relief or money to emigrate, including women writing to the wife of the landowners pleading for a spare cloak or item of clothing that might see them through the coming winter. As many landlords served on the local Relief Committees, their papers can record relief that was given to tenants.

Famine orphans, especially young women, were selected from Irish workhouses by officers of the Emigration Commission, and taken to Australia in the late 1840s and early 1850s in a programme known as the Earl Grey Scheme. These emigrants can be found listed at the Irish Famine Memorial in Sydney, and the names are online at **https://irishfamine memorial.org/orphans/names-on-the-monument/.** There were also men and women who committed a crime, seeking transportation to Australia as a convict, as relief from the deprivation in Ireland at the time. A transportation database has been published on the website of the NAI, which you can access via **https://findingaids.nationalarchives.ie/index.php?category=18&subcategory=147.**

## Dead, Or Departed?

Few Irish parishes maintained burial records during the period of the Famine, and the civil registration of deaths had not been established. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether a family who left their land died, or emigrated. However, baptisms and marriages do survive for this period for some, but not all, parishes.

If you know where your ancestors lived before the Famine, take a close look at the surviving parish registers, Famine Relief Commission letter books, census reports, surviving workhouse records, local newspapers and estate papers for information about its impact on their parish.

**TOP TIP!**

Minimal documentation survives from the Famine period, so don't rely on large databases. See **johngrenham.com/places/** for potential sources for a civil parish.

## Resources

**Take your research further**

**BOOK**

*Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*
**John Crowley, William J Smyth and Mike Murphy (editors)**
*Cork University Press, 2012*
A US edition of this weighty tome documenting the Famine can be borrowed from the Internet Archive (**tinyurl.com/arch-crow**).

**MUSEUMS**

COBH HERITAGE CENTRE
a Cobh, County Cork, P24 CY67, Ireland
t +353 21 481 3591
e *info@cobhheritage.com*
w **cobhheritage.com**
You can uncover the story of Ireland's emigrants here.

NATIONAL FAMINE MUSEUM
a Strokestown Park, Strokestown, County Roscommon, F42 H282, Ireland
t +353 71 963 3013
e *info@strokestownpark.ie*
w **strokestownpark.ie/national-famine-museum/**
Learn more about the impact of the Great Famine.

**WEBSITES**

HISTORY IRELAND
w **historyireland.com**
You can view articles about the Famine that have been published in the magazine by searching its website.

RTE
w **rte.ie/history/the-great-irish-famine**
Ireland's TV station has created a valuable digital hub on the Famine that includes maps, podcasts, articles and documentaries.

**NICOLA MORRIS** is a director of Timeline Research (**timeline.ie**) and has appeared on numerous episodes of *WDYTYA?*

Members of the crew of the submarine HMS *Holland 2* photographed off Gosport on the Hampshire coast, c1905

# ROYAL NAVY

## Millions of records from the Senior Service are available online, writes **Jonathan Scott**

The National Archives at Kew (TNA) makes our Top Five this month for the simple reason that it's one of the best places to familiarise yourself with the types of Royal Navy (RN) records that survive, and how these have changed over time. Some RN records are available to download, while others are only indexed. Ships' musters, for example, which can help you confirm the vessels on which someone served, can be searched via TNA's online catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/advanced-search**), but you will have to visit TNA to see the originals.

Many of the most important records are already available digitally for free, or on pay-per-view or subscription websites. This means that a first tentative search may lead to a deluge of results. An unusual name will help narrow things down, as will details of your ancestor's career – eg approximate dates, rank and/or name of vessel – assuming you can uncover them. Remember too that personnel records are divided into those for officers and those for ratings: enlisted sailors ranked below warrant officers and commissioned officers.

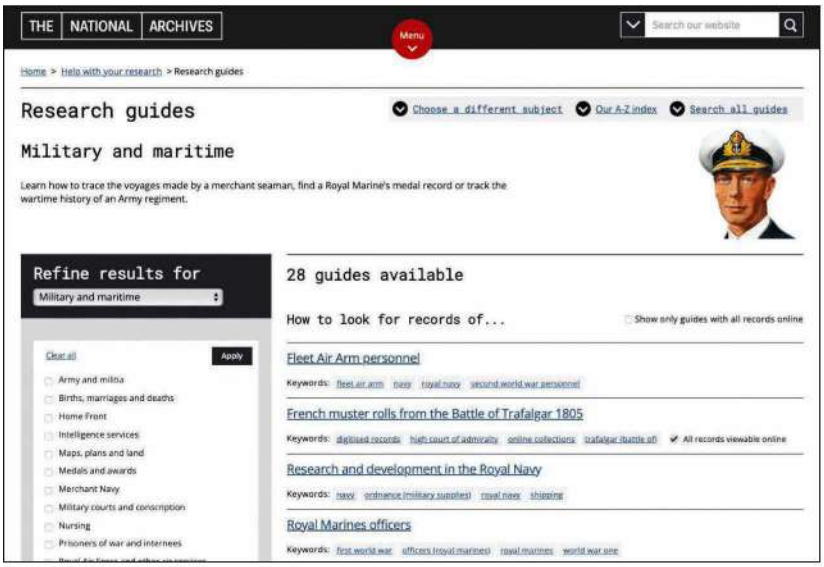
GETTY IMAGES

### FIRST WORLD WAR – LIVES AT SEA

w **royalnavyrecordsww1.rmg.co.uk**

This free, easy-to-use database allows you to search service records of RN officers and ratings from the First World War era. It reveals place and date of birth; next of kin; service number; occupation; name of ship, submarine or shore establishment; medals awarded; where buried or commemorated; rank; plus cause and date of discharge. It's a collaboration between TNA, the Crew List Index Project (**crewlist.org.uk**) and the National Maritime Museum. At present there's about 41,000 service records here, and the team expect the remaining records to be added by December this year. However, note that members of the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR), Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) and Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) are not included.

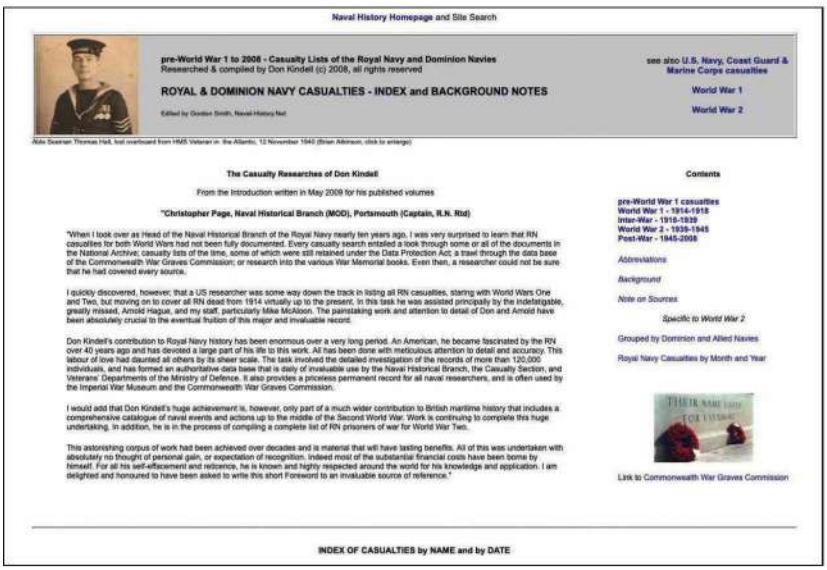
# BEST WEBSITES




## THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

w **tinyurl.com/tna-guides-military-rn**

The RN research guides available here are generally subdivided by personnel (officers, ratings, reserves, medical officers, dockyard staff, RNAS etc), period or type of record. In short, TNA holds service records for officers (1756–1931) and ratings (1853–1928), which can help you trace someone's career ship by ship, also recording next of kin, height and complexion. Many have been indexed and can be searched via Discovery, and a significant number are free to download. You could also try the old Trafalgar Ancestors Database (**nationalarchives.gov.uk/trafalgarancestors/**) with the names of more than 18,000 men on the British side in the Battle of Trafalgar (1805).




## NAVAL-HISTORY.NET

w **naval-history.net**

Created by Gordon Smith, who sadly passed away in 2016, this website exists to make hard-to-find contemporary accounts of naval history available for all. The simple, old-fashioned design masks just how much valuable information is here. The main index divides content by conflict, but as you click into the First World War section, for example, you find yourself immersed in ever more detailed material. Highlights include logbooks from RN vessels, totalling about 300,000 pages. You can also search through casualty lists, which give name, rank, part of the service (if other than the RN), service number (ratings only) and fate.

## EXPERT'S CHOICE

**Dr Simon Wills** is the author of *Tracing Your Seafaring Ancestors* (2016)

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe's battleship the *Iron Duke*, the year before he commanded the Grand Fleet at Jutland

The Battle of Jutland began on 31 May 1916 off the Jutland Peninsula, Denmark, and ended on 1 June 1916. This clash between German and British fleets was the largest naval battle of the First World War. Afterwards, the German fleet withdrew to port and never emerged again, while Britain was free to control trade and all other movement by sea. So strategically the victory was Britain's. However, that victory came at a cost of more than 6,000 RN servicemen's lives and the loss of 14 ships, compared with the Germans' losing about 2,500 men and 11 ships.

The Battle of Jutland Royal Naval Casualty Database, located at **porttowns.port.ac.uk/source-information/jutland-casualty-database/**, is the most comprehensive record of the British men who died as a result of the battle. Personal information of value to genealogists is recorded for every individual including name, ship, rank, service number, date and place of birth. It also includes the name and address of their next of kin as recorded by the Admiralty, Commonwealth War Graves Commission rolls, probate or the 1911 census. All of this information is presented via a large interactive table. Note that you must drag the scroll bar (at the bottom) to the right if you want to see all of the columns, including address and next of kin.

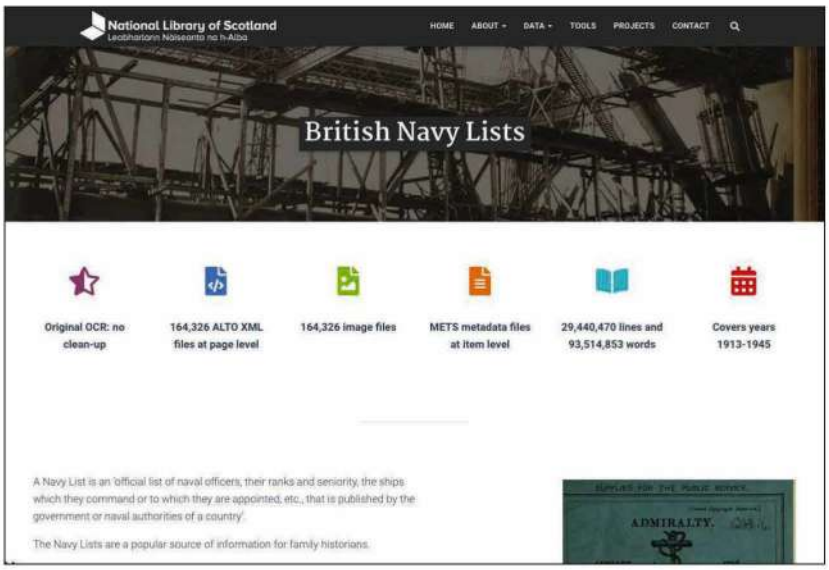
The men are also plotted on an accompanying digital map, according to where they lived when they enlisted. This map can be searched by name, location, ship, memorial and other criteria, and some entries include photographs. However, the map seemed to be inaccessible at time of writing.

GETTY IMAGES

## ANCESTRY

w **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1687/**

Both Ancestry and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) have important RN resources, mainly from TNA. Sometimes these will include digitised records, at others they will turn out to be indexes to material available to download from TNA's website. The best way to figure out exactly who has what is by using the aforementioned TNA research guides. Ancestry's highlights include service records, pay registers and certificates of service, plus medal and award rolls – the 1793–1972 collection linked to above contains lists of more than 1.5 million names. Findmypast meanwhile has ships' muster rolls, which are useful for research before service records began in 1853.




## BRITISH NAVY LISTS

w **data.nls.uk/data/digitised-collections/british-navy-lists/**

The Navy List was a monthly publication that printed the names of officers on active duty – so you won't find any references to ratings here. There's not a great deal of information in each entry, but it did record where and when they were serving, and so offers researchers a slightly cumbersome way of tracing someone's career. The web address featured above takes you to the National Library of Scotland's 'Data Foundry' zone, where you can download a massive cache of digitised pages from the First and Second World Wars. Alternatively you can browse or download individual volumes via the Internet Archive (**archive.org/details/nlsnavylists**).

# Go Further

**More online gems you can't afford to miss**

## AGE OF NELSON

w **ageofnelson.org**

Although a bit glitchy, this website includes a digital encyclopaedia of RN ships, 1793-1815.

## BROADSIDE

w **nelsonsnavy.co.uk**

The pages here describe life in the RN in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

## COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

w **cwgc.org**

Here you can search names recorded on the memorials built in the RN manning ports of Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth.

## FORCES WAR RECORDS

w **https://uk.forceswarrecords.com**

This subscription site has data relating to the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth, the Royal Marines and RN officers' medal rolls.

## IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS

w **tinyurl.com/iwm-guide-royal-navy**

This useful page explains where to find the most important RN service records. More recent records are only available to next of kin, via **www.gov.uk/get-copy-military-records-of-service**.

## NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

w **rmg.co.uk/collections**

Explore RN collections held by the museum in Greenwich, including uniforms and ship plans.

## NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL NAVY

w **nmrn.org.uk**

Find out more about various RN museums.

## NAVY RECORDS SOCIETY

w **navyrecords.org.uk**

This group publishes rare documents.

## ROYAL NAVY RESEARCH ARCHIVES

w **royalnavyresearcharchive.org.uk**

Discover details of RN ships, establishments, units and personnel via this 'virtual museum'.

# RAF WW2 Combat Reports

**Simon Fowler** explains how you can read digitised official accounts of RAF pilots' deadly dogfights during the Second World War

An RAF Hawker Hurricane flees after shooting down a Heinkel bomber

GETTY IMAGES

During the Second World War, Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots or air gunners had to complete official combat reports after they had encountered enemy aircraft on operational flights. Since the records were compiled immediately after aerial battles, following a debriefing by the unit intelligence officer, they are unique eyewitness accounts of pilots and gunners downing enemy aircraft, offering a real sense of what airmen experienced.

The National Archives at Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**) has more than 34,000 reports in the Air Ministry series AIR 50. They are mainly for combats that Hurricanes and Spitfires fought with the Luftwaffe's Messerschmitt fighters and Heinkel bombers during the Battle of Britain. No reports are known to survive for the units operating in Burma, and very few from the Middle East and Italy. Nor are there any for the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm, or the Army Air Corps. Oddly many were stolen from TNA's predecessor the Public Record Office in Central London during the 1980s. Some were recovered from the thief – who argued wrongly that he could do a better job of preserving them – but others have never been found. This is one reason why your belongings are now very carefully checked by staff when you leave the reading rooms at Kew!

> Each report varies in layout and content depending on the incident described

## Crucial Information

The combat reports have no set format. Each one varies in layout and content depending on the incident being described. But all of them will tell you roughly where and when the incident took place, and the number of enemy aircraft claimed to have been destroyed. Reports often note the fate of any enemy pilots or navigators who managed to escape their burning aircraft by parachute.

They also describe the dogfight in some detail. Bomber Command reports that were written after sorties over Europe by air gunners tend to be rather more formulaic than those compiled by men in Fighter or Coastal commands. They were compiled by very tired air gunners after their aircraft had returned from a raid. ▶

# Combat Report, 1940

This combat report was submitted by Sergeant Frank Walker-Smith, No. 85 Squadron. It is held by The National Archives (AIR 50/36/82) and available digitally via Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**)

**1 Walker-Smith**
The name of the pilot making the claim is recorded. It was normal only to give the surname.

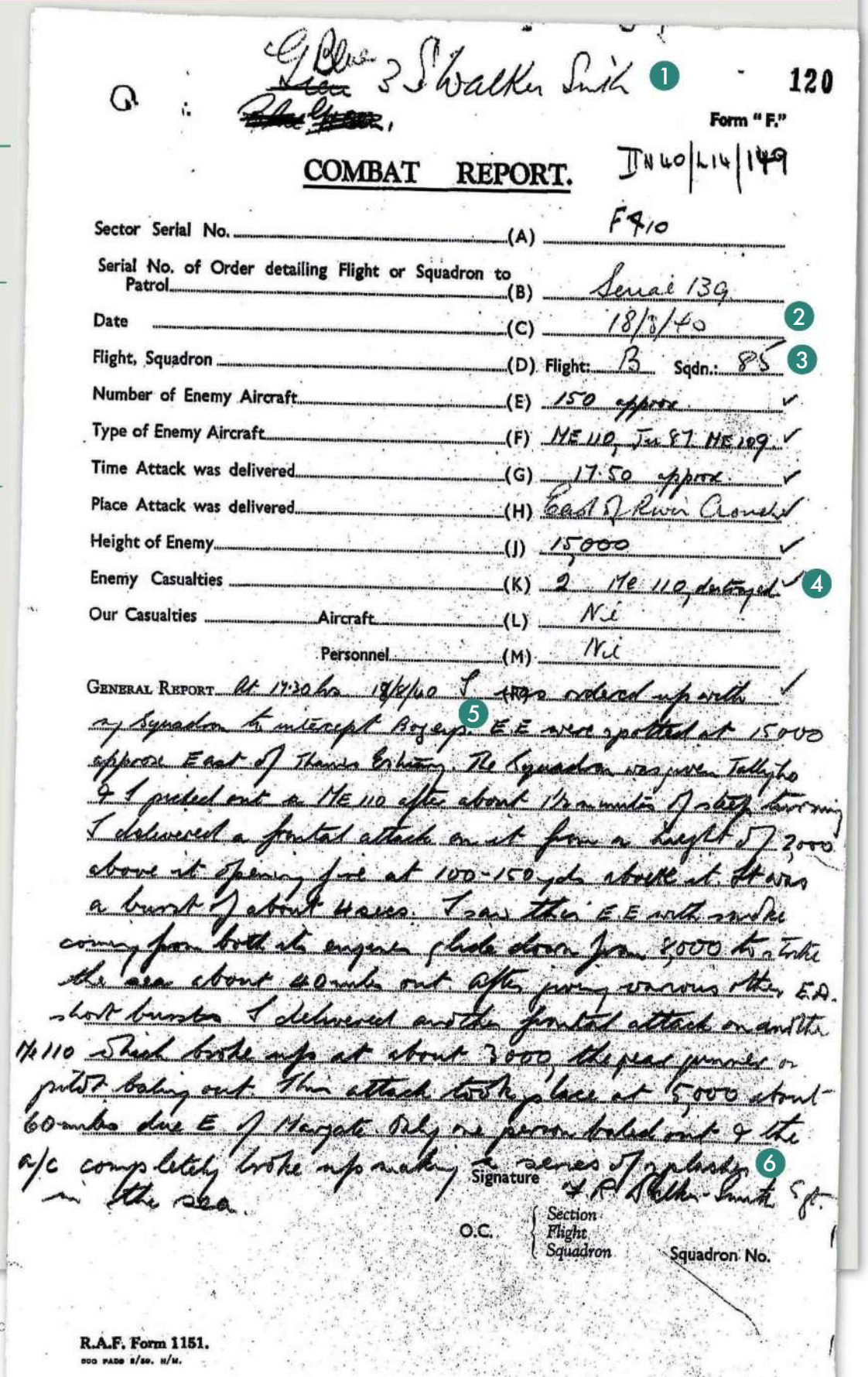
**2 Date**
The report always includes the date and approximate time that the dogfight occurred.

**3 Flight**
Fighter squadrons comprised two flights, A and B, each containing six aircraft. In turn flights were divided into four sections, each of them made up of three aircraft.

**4 Enemy Casualties**
There are details of the enemy aircraft claimed shot down. Messerschmitt Bf 110 aircraft were twin-engine fighter–bombers whose relative lack of manoeuvrability was exploited by RAF pilots.

**5 Bogeys**
'Bogey' means an unidentified – and presumably hostile – aircraft. Abbreviations and jargon are frequently included in the reports, and can sometimes be difficult to interpret.

**6 Splashes**
If the aircraft was not seen crashing or at least on fire plummeting towards the earth – or the sea, in this case – then the kill could not be claimed, so these kinds of details are always mentioned in combat reports.



G Blue 3 S Walker Smith 1 120

Form "F."

COMBAT REPORT. IN 40/L14/149

Sector Serial No. (A) F410

Serial No. of Order detailing Flight or Squadron to Patrol (B) Serial 139

Date (C) 18/8/40 2

Flight, Squadron (D) Flight: B Sqdn.: 85 3

Number of Enemy Aircraft (E) 150 approx ✓

Type of Enemy Aircraft (F) ME 110, Ju 87 ME 109 ✓

Time Attack was delivered (G) 17.50 approx ✓

Place Attack was delivered (H) East of River Crouch ✓

Height of Enemy (J) 15,000 ✓

Enemy Casualties (K) 2 Me 110, destroyed ✓ 4

Our Casualties Aircraft (L) Nil

Personnel (M) Nil

General Report At 17.30 hrs 18/8/40 I was ordered up with my Squadron to intercept Bogeys. 5 E.E were spotted at 15000 approx East of Thames Estuary. The Squadron was given Tallyho & I picked out a ME 110 after about 1½ minutes of steep turning I delivered a frontal attack on it from a height of 2000 above it opening fire at 100-150 yds above it. It was a burst of about 4 secs. I saw this E.E with smoke coming from both its engines glide down from 8,000 to strike the sea about 40 miles out. After giving various other E.A. short bursts I delivered another frontal attack on another Me 110 which broke up at about 3000, the rear gunner or pilot baling out. This attack took place at 5,000 about 60 miles due E of Margate. Only one person baled out & the a/c completely broke up making a series of splashes 6 in the sea.

Signature F R Walker-Smith Sgt.

O.C. Section / Flight / Squadron Squadron No.

R.A.F. Form 1151.

An intelligence officer writes down a report of the combat of a Supermarine Spitfire in 1941 at RAF Kirton in Lindsey

The records had several functions. First, to confirm that the pilot had shot down an enemy aircraft. This would be needed as proof if the pilot became an air ace, having shot down five or more enemy aircraft. Such men instantly became popular heroes, particularly during the dark days of 1940. In addition, the reports provided information to help the RAF train aircrews to more effectively shoot down the enemy, as well as to better understand their tactics. The greatest British ace of the war was Wing Commander James 'Johnnie' Johnson, who was credited with 34 individual victories.

## Thrilling Detail

A sense of excitement often flows through the reports. Pilot officer Frank Walker-Smith, No. 85 Squadron, shot down an ME109 fighter over the Kent coast on 28 August 1940. The combat report reads: "The squadron attacked in formation, but split up as it did so. I picked out one Me 109 and gave it a two second burst as it crossed my bows 200 yards away. It then dived into a cloud and I followed. I then noticed it cross a gap and climb up again. Staying in the top layer of cloud, I opened up and drew up to within 200 yards of him, and slightly underneath him.

"As I manoeuvred into position I gave him a five-second burst and noted the shots to be penetrating. After about four seconds the port petrol tank was seen to burst and the machine then wobbled slightly and went into a steep dive.

"At that exact moment I was shot at from behind and had to do a steep turn to the left to avoid being shot down."

It is believed that the prime minister Winston Churchill witnessed the battle during a tour of coastal defences.

The annotated document (see page 39) describes the first aircraft Walker-Smith shot down on 18 August 1940. Sadly he died in a flying accident in 1941.

## Free Downloads

All of the reports can be downloaded via TNA's catalogue Discovery at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2105**. They cost £3.50 each, but can be downloaded for free if you create a user account and are logged in. You can search the catalogue descriptions by pilot's surname or squadron. As well as reports from RAF pilots there are also a few submitted by Allied pilots and air gunners.

Records from 1940 until the end of May 1941 are in Ancestry's collection 'UK and Allied Countries, World War II Air Combat Reports, 1939–1945' at **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62605**, and Findmypast's collection 'British Royal Air Force, Combat Reports 1939–1945' at **search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/british-royal-air-force-combat-reports-1939-1945**.

Similar reports for the First World War are in series AIR 1 at Kew, searchable at **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2056**. However, they are not online.

### TOP TIP!

The International Bomber Command Centre has created an online quiz where you can test your knowledge of period RAF slang: **internationalbcc.co.uk/about-ibcc/news/raf-slang**.

## Resources

**Don't miss these websites**

### THE GAZETTE

w **thegazette.co.uk**

Citations for gallantry medals awarded to aircrew were published in the *London Gazette*. You can search and view back issues online for free.

### THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

w **tinyurl.com/tna-guides-raf-etc**

TNA's site includes expert guides to researching members of the RAF and other air services.

### WDYTYA? MAGAZINE

w **tinyurl.com/wdytya-orb**

You can find out more about the activities of RAF squadrons during the world wars from their Operation Record Books (ORBs), and there's advice about accessing them online on the magazine's website.

### WINGLEADER BOOKS

w **wingleader.co.uk**

Titles published by Wingleader in its *Combat Archive* series contain extensive accounts of Second World War air battles. Full details of each volume's coverage are available on its website.

**SIMON FOWLER** worked at TNA in Kew for 30 years. His latest book *How to Research Your Second World War Ancestors* will be published by The History Press on 3 October

GETTY IMAGES

# Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Dave Annal is a genealogist, author and lecturer

Marie-Louise Backhurst is the author of *Tracing Your Channel Islands Ancestors*

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

Jayne Shrimpton is a professional dress historian and portrait specialist

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

Simon Wills is a genealogist and wrote *Tracing Your Seafaring Ancestors*


# What unit was my grandfather recruited into during WW1?

**A War Diary showing where the men fought can be downloaded for free**

Q My grandfather, James Inglesby, was a driver in the Royal Field Artillery during the First World War. He had been an ag lab and enlisted, we believe, in 1915. He was gassed and lost a lung, and became a horse shunter on the railway after the war. His army service records were among those lost to fire during the Second World War, so we have his medal record but not much else. How can we find out what unit he joined and where he served? He lived in Oundle, Northamptonshire, before he enlisted.

**Tony Mason**

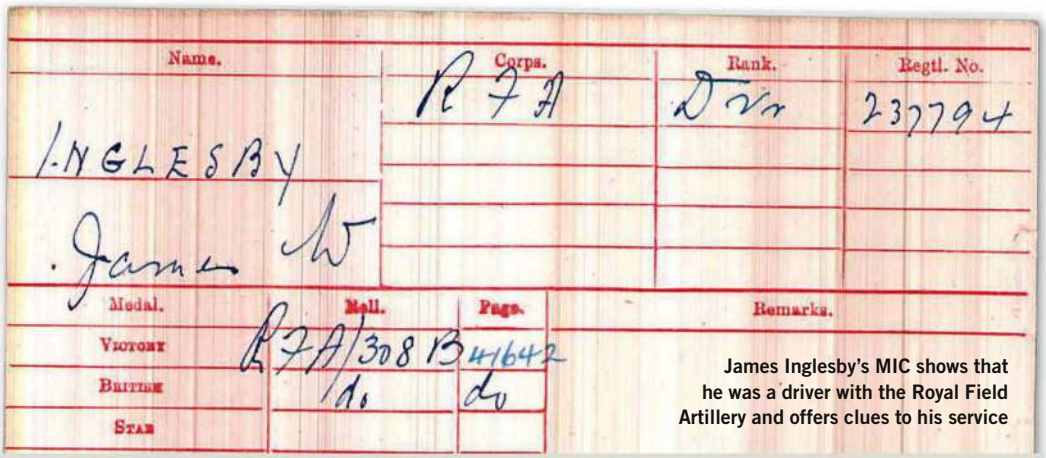
A James Inglesby appears in several online records around the time of the First World War. In the Oundle voters' rolls on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**), he's James W Inglesby; and James William Inglesby on the 1911 census and the Trade Union Registers (also on Findmypast), where in 1915 he's a railway porter. He seems to be the only James W Inglesby on the main genealogical websites.

He must be Gunner James W Inglesby, whose Medal Index Card (MIC) shows him as a driver in the Royal Field Artillery (RFA), number 237794. The fact there is no mention of a 1914/15 Star means he only served overseas from 1916 onwards and, because there's no entry in the "Theatre of War first served in" box, he must have first served in France/Belgium. Numbers would indicate other theatres. The only other document referring to his service is the medal roll (on Ancestry; **ancestry.co.uk**), which restates the MIC information. But it does offer some other clues.

Regimental numbers were issued sequentially, so men with similar ones on a roll are likely to have trained, and possibly served, together. Searching Findmypast using just a similar number and "Royal Field Artillery" generally only brings up reference to the soldiers' MICs, but 237792 (Barragry) and 237796 (Dunster) both enlisted in December 1917 suggesting James was conscripted then and served in France from the summer of 1918 (after his training).

Gunner Reynolds (237798), just below James on the roll, is noted as "Dead 23-10-18" and was in 124 Brigade RFA per the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's site (**cwgc.org**). This brigade served with 37th Division in France from July 1915 to March 1919. If the two men served together, a War Diary showing where they fought can be downloaded for free from The National Archives (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**, reference WO 95/2521/4).

**Phil Tomaselli**




**James Inglesby's MIC shows that he was a driver with the Royal Field Artillery and offers clues to his service**

**HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL?** Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

John was surprised to see that his distant relation Kathleen Marshall appears to be in two places at once on the 1939 Register

# Why are there two Kathleen Marshalls born on the same day on the 1939 Register?

**Q** I'm trying to find a Kathleen Marshall, who married into a half-branch of my family tree, and thought the answer might lie in the 1939 Register. Instead, I have come across two Kathleen Marshalls, both born on 13 January 1909 and living just two doors apart at 23 and 27 Sandecotes Road in Poole, Dorset. Is this anything more than a very strange coincidence?
**John Spencer Smith**

**A** Before looking in detail at your query, let's briefly consider the 1939 Register itself. The register was created shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, and was used during that war for issuing identity cards, ration books and administrative matters. Afterwards, it was used by the National Health Service for nearly 50 years and constantly updated.

Only digital copies of the 1939 Register are available to the public; the originals, which are held by NHS Digital (**digital.nhs.uk**), cannot be viewed. Although individual entries spanned a double page, the digital copies are of the left-hand page and the first column of the right-hand page only. The rest of the right-hand page, known as the "postings" column, was used by the NHS until its records were computerised. Since this column may contain sensitive information, it is not available to the public.

Looking at the two Kathleen Marshall entries, in one, Kathleen is listed on a typical-looking page at 27 Sandecotes Road. The other entry appears on a page on which nearly all of the entries are closed. From the few entries that can be seen, it is clear they are a number of apparently random entries, all of which are annotated "Re-entered from page…" or "See Page…". What we have here are continuation entries, which were created when the postings column for an individual was full and a new line was added for additional information.

Both entries, therefore, relate to the same Kathleen Marshall. Why the different house number? This could be a clerical error, or simply that Kathleen had moved from number 27 to number 23 by the time the continuation entry was made.
**Katherine Cobb**

# Who were Richard Thornhill Thompson's parents?

**Q** My great great grandfather, Richard Thornhill Thompson, married Susannah Neal in 1841 in Surrey, naming his father as Richard Thompson, deceased. An "M Thornhill Thompson" was a witness.

Could his father be the Richard Turnill Thompson who married Sarah Burbidge in Spalding, Lincolnshire, in 1820 and died in 1870? Richard Thornhill was born c1821, but Richard Turnill's son (Henry) was born that year. I have done DNA tests, but can get no further than matches with Richard Thornhill Thompson.
**Julie Thompson**

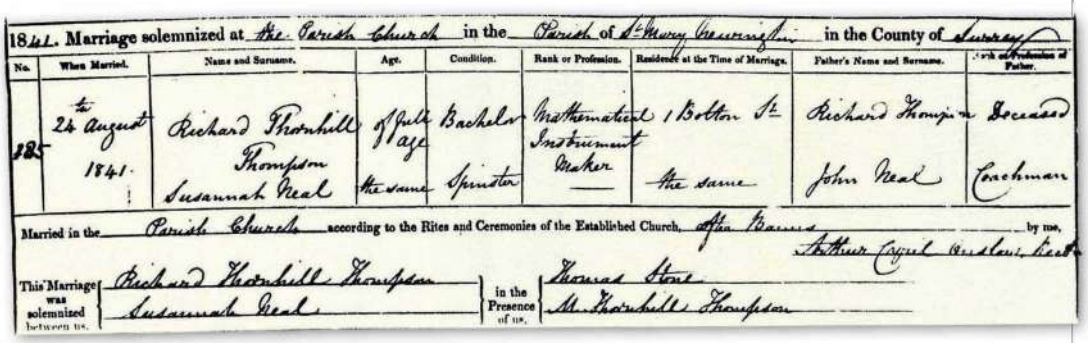
**A** In the 1841 census, a Matilda Thompson is living with the parents of Susannah Neal in Great Bolton Street, Lambeth. She is aged 23, and was not born in Surrey. She seems quite likely to be the MT Thompson who witnessed the marriage of Richard Thornhill Thompson – possibly his sister.

It would be worth looking for her marriage after 1841, as her name is much more unusual than her brother's. Her marriage certificate may provide further information, such as her father's occupation, which may help identify him. A Matilda Thompson married in Lambeth in 1855, but there are others around London.

There are no obvious connections with the Lincolnshire family and the birth of Richard has to be established first, unless you research that family to the present day and compare your DNA with them.

Thornhill is also a place and street name in North London. Could he have been a foundling? Abandoned children were often given the name of the street in which they were found.

In addition, a Sir James Thornhill was the father-in-law of painter William Hogarth, one of the first governors of the Foundling Hospital, a friend and supporter of Thomas Coram who established it in Bloomsbury. The children were given new names, cared for and educated, and apprenticeships arranged for them. Many were named after people associated with the hospital. It may be worth consulting the meticulous records. You can contact the archives by emailing *voices throughtime@coram.org.uk*.
**Steve Thomas**



1841. Marriage solemnized at the Parish Church in the Parish of St Mary Newington in the County of Surrey

| No. | When Married. | Name and Surname. | Age. | Condition. | Rank or Profession. | Residence at the Time of Marriage. | Father's Name and Surname. | Rank or Profession of Father. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 285 | 24th August 1841. | Richard Thornhill Thompson<br>Susannah Neal | of full age<br>the same | Bachelor<br>Spinster | Mathematical Instrument Maker | 1 Bolton St<br>the same | Richard Thompson<br>John Neal | Deceased<br>Coachman |

Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, after Banns by me, Arthur Cayzil Onslow, Rect.

This Marriage was solemnized between us: Richard Thornhill Thompson, Susannah Neal — in the Presence of us: Thomas Stone, M. Thornhill Thompson

Julie is keen to research the life of Richard Thompson, her 4x great grandfather according to this marriage record

# Picture Analysis

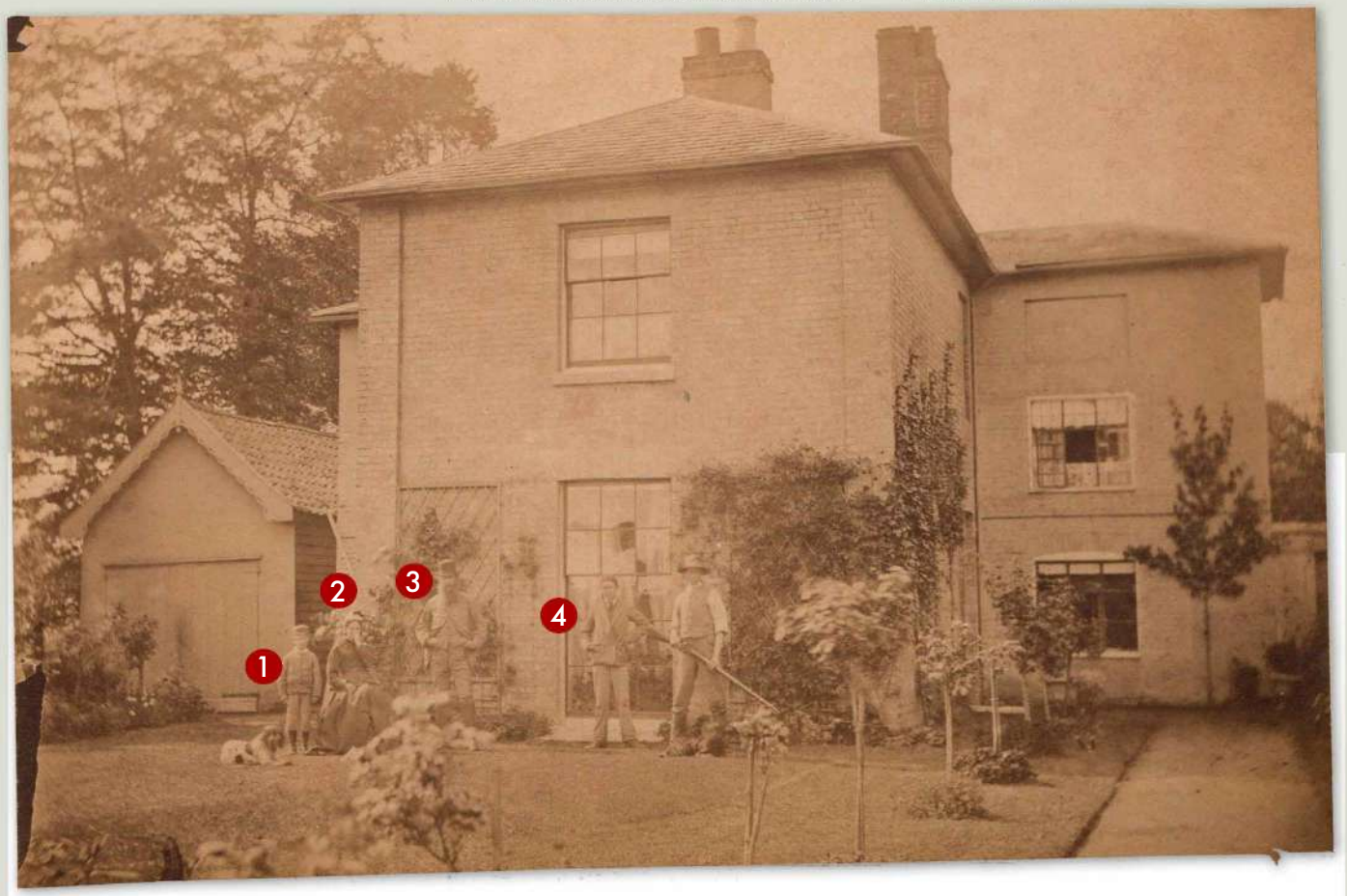
# Does this photograph show Heath Cottage?

**Q** This photograph was passed down through my grandmother's family in an album. No one knows where or when it was taken, nor whom it depicts. It could be my grandmother's grandfather, James Mackenzie (1824–1890), with his wife and three of his four sons – the youngest of whom was born in 1855. Between 1855 and his death, the family lived at Heath Cottage, Essex. Could this be the house?
**Rob Webb**

**A** This fine outdoor scene portrays a comfortably placed late Victorian family at their well-kept rural home. It's a professional photograph taken by an itinerant operator, or a representative from a local studio. We can't identify the location, so must consider how the photo could connect to your family history.

Such open-air scenes can be reliably dated from the evidence of dress, especially female fashions. The wife/mother in this group wears a formal dark-coloured daytime costume with a white cap, her clothing and headwear dateable to the early to mid-1880s. This timeframe is also supported by the appearance of her husband and sons.

So, although the year, c1880–1886, falls within your great great grandfather's lifetime, these parents in their late 30s/40s and their boys can't be James Mackenzie Roberts, whose last son was born in 1855, and family. Rather, they may well represent the next generation, perhaps even your grandmother's parents with some of their children.
**Jayne Shrimpton**




**1 BOY'S OUTFIT**
The youngest boy in the photograph wears an age-appropriate narrow buttoned jacket and slim open-ended knickerbockers of the 1880s.

**2 LADY'S OUTFIT**
The lady's fashionable plain cloth outfit – a tight-fitting, front-fastening, hip-length jacket-bodice accessorised with a deep circular collar and teamed with a tailored skirt – is typical of the early to mid-1880s. By the 1880s her white day cap with a dark bow was mainly favoured by mature women.

**3 MAN'S OUTFIT**
The adult male wears a stiff late Victorian bowler hat, its moderately tall crown a style fashionable in the 1880s. His very full bushy beard may partly reflect his rural/outdoor lifestyle, but was also popular in the later 1870s and early to mid-1880s.

**4 SUITS**
The middle son wears a long-trouser lounge suit of fashionable cut, while the older son carries a rifle and has a modified suit with a wide-brimmed country hat. In addition, his trousers are tucked into leather boots.

# Where do I find a Jersey marriage certificate?

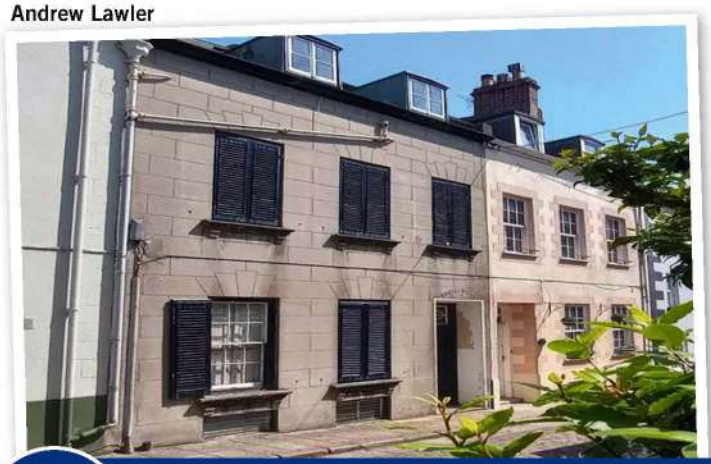
**Q** My paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Donnelly, was born on 25 January 1911 to John Donnelly and Mabel Stansfield. A note on her birth certificate says that John and Mabel were married in St Helier, Island of Jersey, on 6 July 1904. I have not been able to find a marriage certificate for them in Jersey or anywhere else in the UK. Could you help me track it down?
**Andrew Lawler**

**A** The Channel Islands – like the Isle of Man, Scotland and Northern Ireland – maintain separate birth, marriage and death registers to those of England and Wales. In the islands, there are two separate bailiwicks: that of Jersey, where civil registers started in 1842; and one for Guernsey (where registers also began in 1842), which includes Alderney (where the registers started in 1850), Sark (in 1925) and Herm. The Office of the Superintendent Registrar holds the marriage records for St Helier for 1904 – see its site at **tinyurl.com/JerseyRegistrar**. Certificates cost £32.31, plus P&P.

John Donnelly and Mabel Stansfield were married in the Registry Office, St Helier, on 6 July 1904. He was a private (soldier) born in Glasgow, aged 22, son of Henry Donnelly, a miner. Mabel was a 20-year-old spinster born in Chobent (sic), Lancashire, the daughter of Daniel Stansfield, a labourer. However, the census shows that John's birthplace was actually Dungannon, County Tyrone. A British Army garrison was based in Jersey until 1936, and a service record on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) tells us that he served in the 2nd Garrison Battalion.

Mabel has an interesting background, as despite being born where her father came from, her parents lived in Jersey for several years. Her mother, Rosalie née Couillard, was of French descent, from Normandy and Brittany. In 1901, Mabel was a servant in the household of a carpenter in St Aubin, Jersey.

There are also useful records held by the Jersey Archive – **https://catalogue.jerseyheritage.org/**. Jerripedia (**jerripedia.com**), "a website dedicated to the history of Jersey and its families", holds information on the Stansfield and Couillard families.
**Marie-Louise Backhurst**



Marie-Louise took this photo of the house in St Aubin where Mabel worked as a servant

**TOP TIP** **Just as in the UK, church weddings continued to be recorded in parish records after the introduction of civil registration. If your ancestor married in a church on Jersey, check out the free Jerripedia database at search.jerripediabmd.net.**

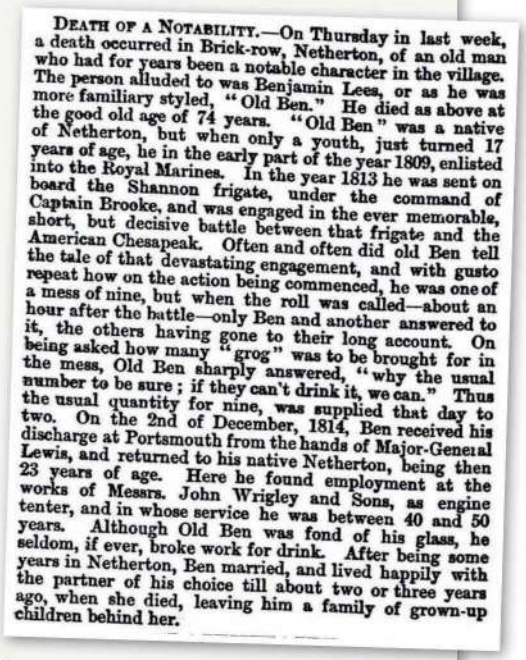
# Was Benjamin Lees really in the Royal Marines?

**Q** An obituary for my 3x great grandfather, Benjamin Lees, reveals that he had been a Royal Marine on HMS *Shannon* when it captured the USS *Chesapeake*. However, I cannot find him in the ship's musters, naval payrolls or other records.
**Nick Taylor**

**A** If Benjamin Lees was a Royal Marine, he should have 'attestation papers' at The National Archives in Kew (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**). These are the documents he signed upon enlistment, and are in series ADM 157 (1790–1925). However, his are missing. It's possible that they have been lost, but it raises suspicion. Furthermore, since marines were hand-picked, high-calibre individuals, the Admiralty tended not to discharge them after a mere five years' service, as is stated in Benjamin's obituary.

Having said that, I would like to caution you over the muster for HMS *Shannon* that you found online. A ship's muster was taken around three times every week. Did you check the muster for the actual date when *Shannon* faced *Chesapeake*? This was 1 June 1813. If you looked at the muster for any other date, then Benjamin might not have been on board. Was the muster you saw an original one from a reputable source, or a transcription? There have been nine ships called HMS *Shannon*, so it can be easy to find you are looking at the wrong ship's records. Again, when viewing naval payrolls, was the right ship and date checked? It's also important to consider name variants, for example B or Ben and Leas or Leese.

It was common for men in this era to exaggerate their military service. I've worked on several cases where an obituary or family paperwork extols the virtues of men who "served with Nelson" or were "at the Battle of Trafalgar" who were not! On current evidence, I'm afraid that whatever his motives, Benjamin wasn't a Marine and didn't serve on HMS *Shannon* – as far as we know.
**Simon Wills**

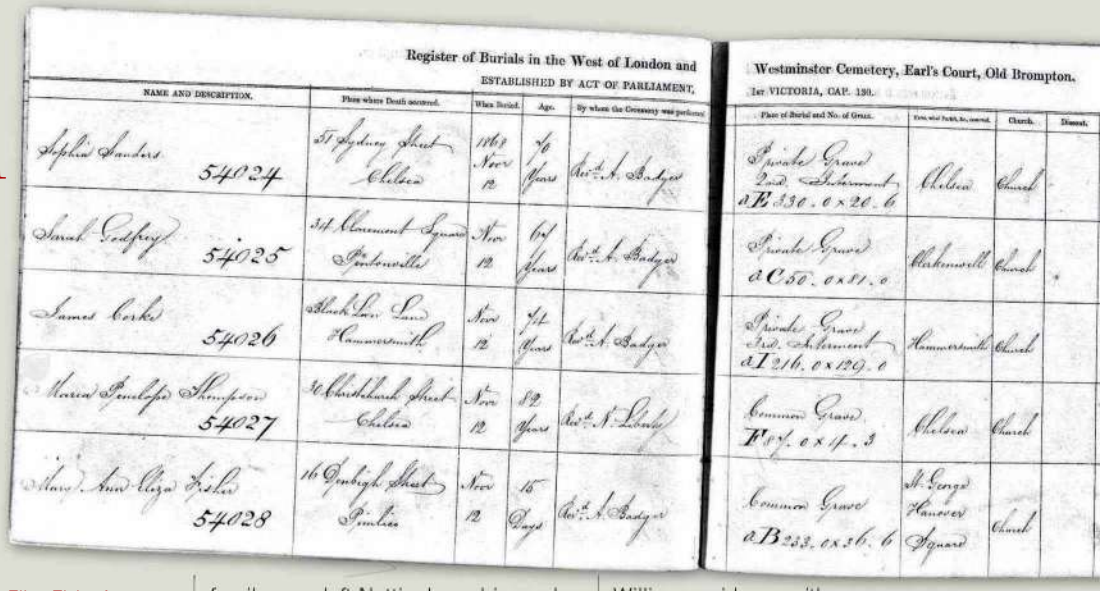


DEATH OF A NOTABILITY.—On Thursday in last week, a death occurred in Brick-row, Netherton, of an old man who had for years been a notable character in the village. The person alluded to was Benjamin Lees, or as he was more familiary styled, "Old Ben." He died as above at the good old age of 74 years. "Old Ben" was a native of Netherton, but when only a youth, just turned 17 years of age, he in the early part of the year 1809, enlisted into the Royal Marines. In the year 1813 he was sent on board the Shannon frigate, under the command of Captain Brooke, and was engaged in the ever memorable, short, but decisive battle between that frigate and the American Chesapeak. Often and often did old Ben tell the tale of that devastating engagement, and with gusto repeat how on the action being commenced, he was one of a mess of nine, but when the roll was called—about an hour after the battle—only Ben and another answered to it, the others having gone to their long account. On being asked how many "grog" was to be brought for in the mess, Old Ben sharply answered, "why the usual number to be sure; if they can't drink it, we can." Thus the usual quantity for nine, was supplied that day to two. On the 2nd of December, 1814, Ben received his discharge at Portsmouth from the hands of Major-General Lewis, and returned to his native Netherton, being then 23 years of age. Here he found employment at the works of Messrs. John Wrigley and Sons, as engine tenter, and in whose service he was between 40 and 50 years. Although Old Ben was fond of his glass, he seldom, if ever, broke work for drink. After being some years in Netherton, Ben married, and lived happily with the partner of his choice till about two or three years ago, when she died, leaving him a family of grown-up children behind her.

The naval service mentioned in Nick's 3x great grandfather's obituary may be exaggerated

# Big Question

# Can you help me find records of my Fisher ancestors?



Register of Burials in the West of London and Westminster Cemetery, Earl's Court, Old Brompton.
ESTABLISHED BY ACT OF PARLIAMENT, 1st VICTORIA, CAP. 130.

| NAME AND DESCRIPTION. | Place where Death occurred. | When Buried. | Age. | By whom the Ceremony was performed | Place of Burial and No. of Grave. | Church. | Dissent. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sophia Sanders 54024 | 51 Sydney Street Chelsea | 1868 Nov 12 | 70 Years | Revd. A. Badger | Private Grave 2nd. Interment aE 330.0×20.6 | Chelsea | Church |
| Sarah Godfrey 54025 | 34 Claremont Square Pentonville | Nov 12 | 67 Years | Revd. A. Badger | Private Grave aC 50.0×81.0 | Clerkenwell | Church |
| James Corke 54026 | Black Lion Lane Hammersmith | Nov 12 | 74 Years | Revd. A. Badger | Private Grave 3rd. Interment aI 216.0×129.0 | Hammersmith | Church |
| Maria Penelope Thompson 54027 | 30 Christchurch Street Chelsea | Nov 12 | 82 Years | Revd. N. Liberty | Common Grave F 87.0×4.3 | Chelsea | Church |
| Mary Ann Eliza Fisher 54028 | 16 Denbigh Street Pimlico | Nov 12 | 15 Days | Revd. A. Badger | Common Grave aB 233.0×36.6 | St. George Hanover Square | Church |

Eliza Fisher's daughter Mary Ann died when she was only 15 days old

**BRYAN HARVEY** contacted us for help tracing Frederic and Eliza Fisher

Q My great great grandmother, Eliza Allison, was born in Colston Bassett, Nottinghamshire. She was baptised on 26 January 1834 at the Church of St Mary in the village, and her father, William Yates Allison, was the local schoolmaster. On 24 June 1857, Eliza gave birth to an illegitimate daughter, Elizabeth Maria, by Henry Burgess Martin, the son of her father's boss. However, she went on to marry Frederic Fisher, a joiner, at St Mary's on 8 October 1865. Eliza and Frederic disappeared after their marriage, leaving Elizabeth with Eliza's parents.

I can find no records relating to the couple after their marriage. What happened to them?

**Bryan Harvey**

A The key to breaking down this brick wall was the discovery of the baptism of Charles William, the son of Frederic(k) and Eliza Fisher, at the parish church of St John the Devine, Colston Bassett, in September 1866. His birth certificate was easily and quickly obtainable as a digital download from the General Register Office (**www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates**), and tells us that he was born on 3 July 1866 – almost exactly nine months after Frederick and Eliza were married. The certificate confirms that Eliza's maiden name was Allison.

Further research revealed that the family soon left Nottinghamshire and travelled to London where, on 25 October 1868, a second child was born: a daughter called Mary Ann Eliza. Sadly, Mary died at 15 days old, and her mother, Eliza, tragically died aged 35 on 1 November 1868 shortly after Mary was born at the family home (16 Denbigh Street, Pimlico, Westminster), as a result of complications following the birth.

We can find Frederick and Charles William in the 1871 and 1881 censuses living in Westminster. Confusingly, Frederick is described in 1881 as married (although there's no sign of a second wife), and there's an unexplained eight-year-old daughter called Mary A Fisher living with him. And in the 1891 census he's listed together with his wife Emma and a 16-year-old daughter called Louisa. Frederick died in 1893, aged 70.

In 1890, Charles William married a woman called Georgina Edith Taylor Hill. He's listed as William Charles in the 1891 census, and he'd evidently got a job as caretaker at Lady Holles School in Redcross Street in the City of London. The family lived on site at the school, and two sons were born there in the 1890s.

Unfortunately, the older child died young and, in a cruel repeat of the events of the previous generation, Georgina died in 1896, leaving Charles William a widower with a young son (Charles Herbert) to care for.

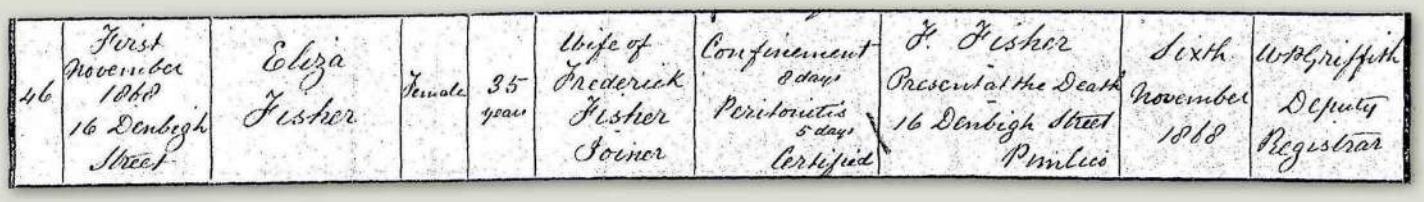
By 1899, the school in Redcross Street had closed down, and relocated to Mare Street in Hackney. We lose sight of Charles for a while, but he reappears in the 1911 census as a 44-year-old hotel waiter living in the Metropolitan Convalescent Institution in Walton-on-Thames, Surrey. The hospital was run by the Westminster Board of Guardians, and Charles appears in a number of admission and discharge registers relating to the Westminster Union in 1911 and 1912, one of which confirms that his date of birth was 3 July 1866.

I haven't been able to discover what happened to Charles William after 1912, but I know that his son was in care by 1911, living in a home for 'waifs and strays' near Reading. At some point, he started using the name Albert Herbert Fisher and it was under this name that he enlisted in the Army in 1914 (apparently as an orphan) and married in 1917.

Albert and his wife, Winifred (née Cocker), settled in Bolton where they had at least five children.

There's a lot more to be discovered about Frederick and Eliza's family, and you may even learn that there are living descendants. Do let us know if you find out anything exciting.

**Dave Annal**



| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 46 | First November 1868 16 Denbigh Street | Eliza Fisher | Female | 35 years | Wife of Frederick Fisher Joiner | Confinement 8 days Peritonitis 5 days Certified | F. Fisher Present at the Death 16 Denbigh Street Pimlico | Sixth November 1868 | W.P. Griffith Deputy Registrar |

Eliza predeceased Mary Ann, dying on 1 November 1868

# Was John Lambourne in the Army?

**Q** My husband's grandfather, John (AKA Jack) Lambourne, started life in Walsall, Staffordshire, in 1878. One story is that he served with the British Army in India. We can find no record of any army service – just this photo (he's standing back left).
**Nicki Proctor**

**A** This photograph was almost certainly taken in India (possibly Burma or Malaya), as shown by the tropical clothing, probably during the First World War.

Service abroad entitled the soldiers to at least one medal, but I can't find any man who clearly fits the bill in the Medal Index Cards listed on The National Archives' (TNA's) catalogue Discovery (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**). I've also checked the pension cards (on the Ancestry-owned military-focused site Forces War Records; **uk.forceswarrecords.com**). Again, nothing.

During the war some, but not all, of the Regular British units in India were replaced, mostly by Territorial Force units. They didn't see action, but were entitled to the British War Medal. But I still can't find a Medal Index Card (MIC) for John.

He was young enough to be conscripted, but I wondered if, for some reason, he'd given a false name before going to India. Checking the Lincolnshire Regiment, I learnt that their 1st Garrison Battalion (formed in September 1915 of older or less-fit men) was transferred to India soon after, and stayed till 1919. Their medal roll is on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and there's no John Lambourne, but I think that he's on there somewhere.

There's no War Diary for the battalion, but the Museum of Lincolnshire Life has a collection of regimental material, as does Lincolnshire Archives. Both are in Lincoln, and can be contacted via *lincolnshirelife_museum@lincolnshire.gov.uk* and *lincolnshire.archives@lincolnshire.gov.uk*.
**Phil Tomaselli**

## 1 SNAKE-BUCKLE BELT

Both John Lambourne and the man standing on the right are wearing First World War-style snake-buckle belts, which were used until the end of 1915 as a stop-gap while uniform production was ramped up.

## 2 BADGES

Nothing gives away tropical climate clothing more than pin-on stripes. The lance corporal is clearly wearing one. Due to heat, sweat and dust, clothing was washed frequently, so rank badges were detachable.

## 3 BELT WITH POUCHES

This belt closely resembles a 1903 pattern belt with detachable pouches used for carrying ammunition or small pieces of equipment.

## 4 NEW UNIFORM BELTS

The seated men both wear belts introduced in 1908 as part of the new uniform webbing – thicker belts with large rectangular buckles.

## 5 BACKGROUND

The background foliage in the picture looks too 'alive' to be even the best cloth background, or even potted plants, and the men are sitting on grass. I think that it was probably taken on a personal camera, explaining why there's no photographer's mark.

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# LOCAL INDUSTRY

Celebrating our ancestors' work in key trades

GETTY IMAGES

# The Farmer's Friends

**Schoolboys from the East End of London who have been evacuated to the countryside help with farm work, 26 August 1941**

Even after schooling was made compulsory in the late 19th century, parents in rural areas would often keep sons and daughters home from school to help with the harvest. So it's no wonder that the Second World War evacuees in this photograph had to pitch in on the farm. Agriculture changed dramatically during the conflict, not least because Britain was importing over half of its food supplies when war broke out, and German attacks on shipping had a massive impact. The wide range of government measures to keep the home front fed included making farming a reserved occupation exempt from conscription; the resurrection of the Women's Land Army scheme created in the First World War; the expansion of the amount of land used for food production; the 'Dig for Victory' campaign encouraging more people to grow fruit and vegetables; and, of course, rationing. You can learn more about wartime farming in England and Wales from the records of the National Farm Survey, which are currently being digitised – see the report on our website at **tinyurl.com/wdytya-nfs**.

# Find your ancestor's home on online maps

**Nick Peers** reveals how to search an updated collection of free Ordnance Survey maps

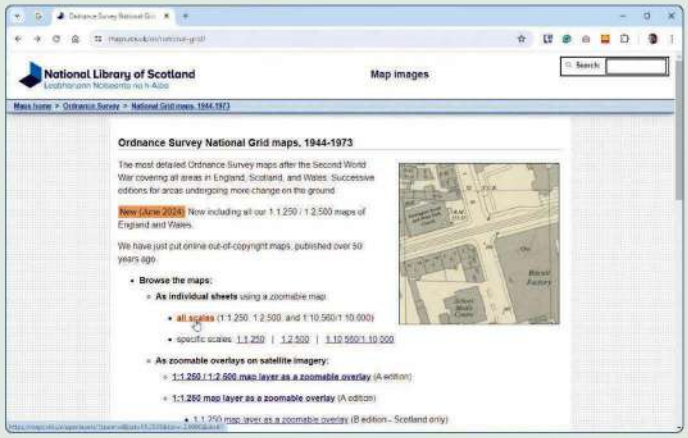
The National Library of Scotland's already impressive collection of free online maps just got a whole lot better for family historians. As mentioned in our news story last month, the NLS has uploaded all of the Ordnance Survey's out-of-copyright maps from 1944–1973 for the whole of England, Wales and Scotland. You can view maps from this period at three magnifications: 1:10,000–1:10,560 maps cover the entire country, while the more detailed 1:2,500 and 1:1,250 maps are restricted mainly to towns and cities.

You can zoom into street level with the 1:10,000 collection, but the 1:2,500 and 1:1,250 maps go into staggering levels of close-up detail, making it possible to view individual properties and even objects like trees. In some areas, more than one map from the period is available, allowing you to trace changes over the 30 years following the Second World War.

In this 'Tech Tips' we'll focus on exploring these new collections, which complement the NLS's existing maps that stretch back centuries. We'll also reveal different ways of comparing the OS maps with those from different periods – including modern maps. The techniques that you learn here can then be translated to other maps in the website's collection.

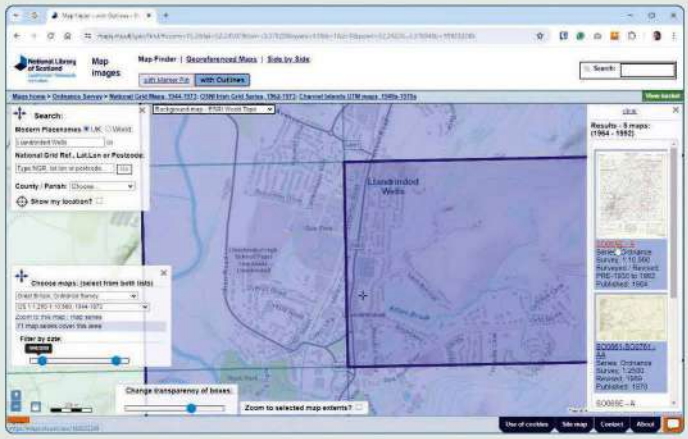
**TOP TIP!**

The NLS's maps site includes Ordnance Survey maps stretching back to the 1840s – visit **maps.nls.uk/os/** to view a complete list and switch between maps.



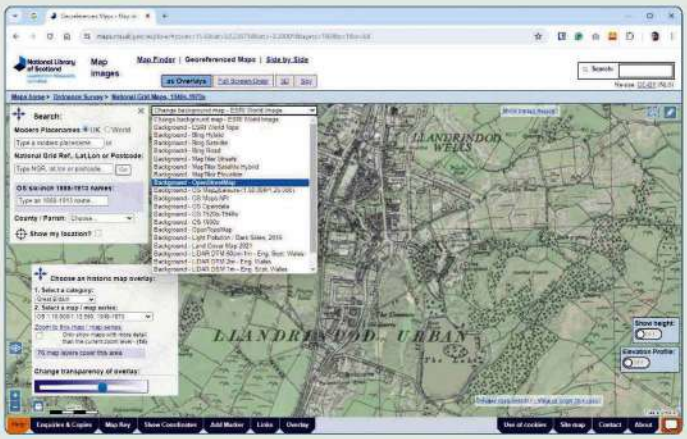

**1 Access The Maps** The quickest way to access the new maps is to go directly to **maps.nls.uk/os/national-grid** in your web browser. You'll see a list of clickable hyperlinks that offer various levels of magnification. Start by clicking the 'all scales' link to switch to the Map Finder web page.

**2 Find Your Location** A pop-up explains how 'Map Finder – with Outlines' works. Click the close button to access the main map. Type the name of the street or place you're looking for into the 'Modern Placenames' text field. A pop-up menu will appear as you type – select your address from this list.

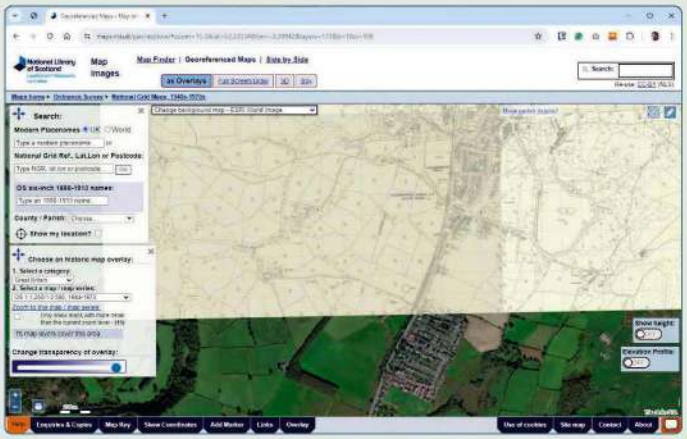



**3 View Map Up Close** You'll zoom into the place you've selected – click on the map where the place is located to view a list of available maps from the collection on the right. The results include maps that are still in copyright, although only those that are now out of copyright can be selected. Click one to view it.

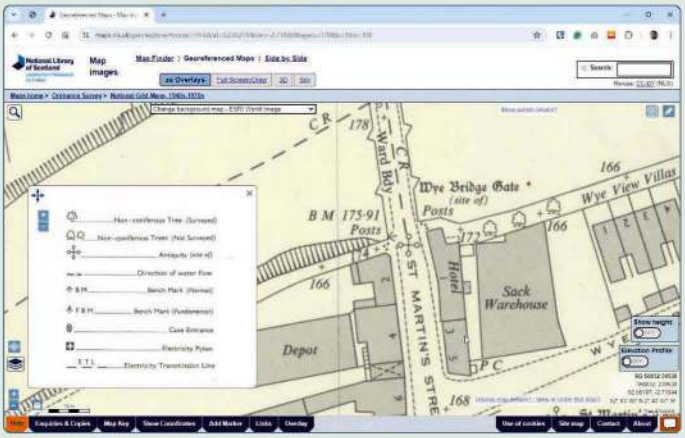
**4 Compare Then And Now** Use your mouse's scroll wheel or the + button at the top left to zoom into the map, and click and drag to move around it. To compare the map with another, click the 'Show location' tab at the bottom then select 'View georeferenced location'. Click the map, then wait for it to switch to the new viewer.



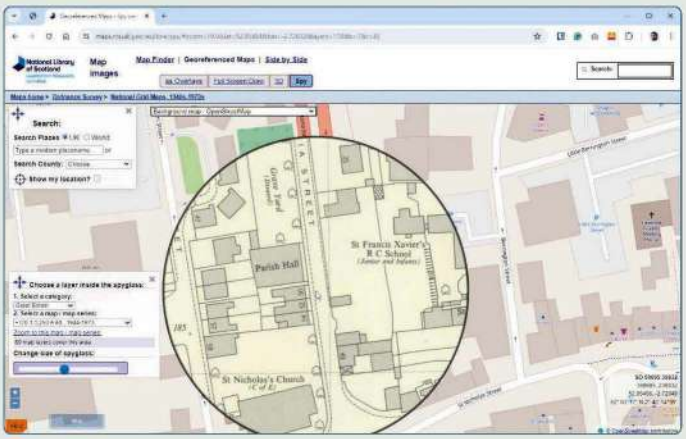

**5 Change The Current Map** Use the 'Change transparency of overlay:' slider in the bottom left to make it more transparent so you can see a modern satellite image of the area beneath. Click the 'Change background map' dropdown to choose a different view, such as 'ESRI World Topo' or 'OpenStreetMap'.



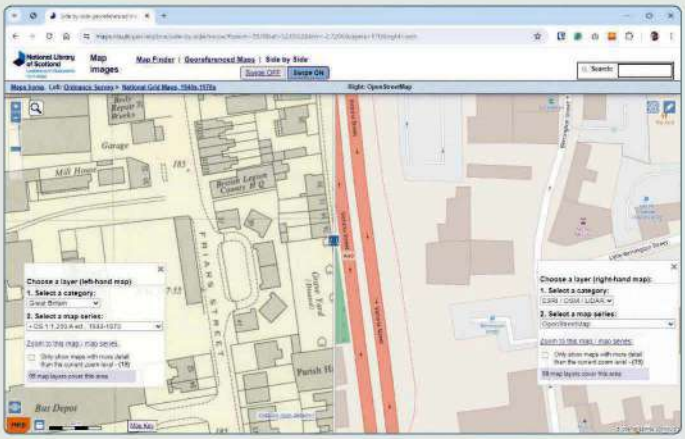
**6 Switch The Map** If you're viewing the 1:10,560 map, click the 'Select a map / map series' dropdown and choose 'OS 1:1,250/1:2,500 1944–1973'. The overlay map will either change to the new, more detailed view or – if one simply doesn't exist for the area in question – vanish completely.



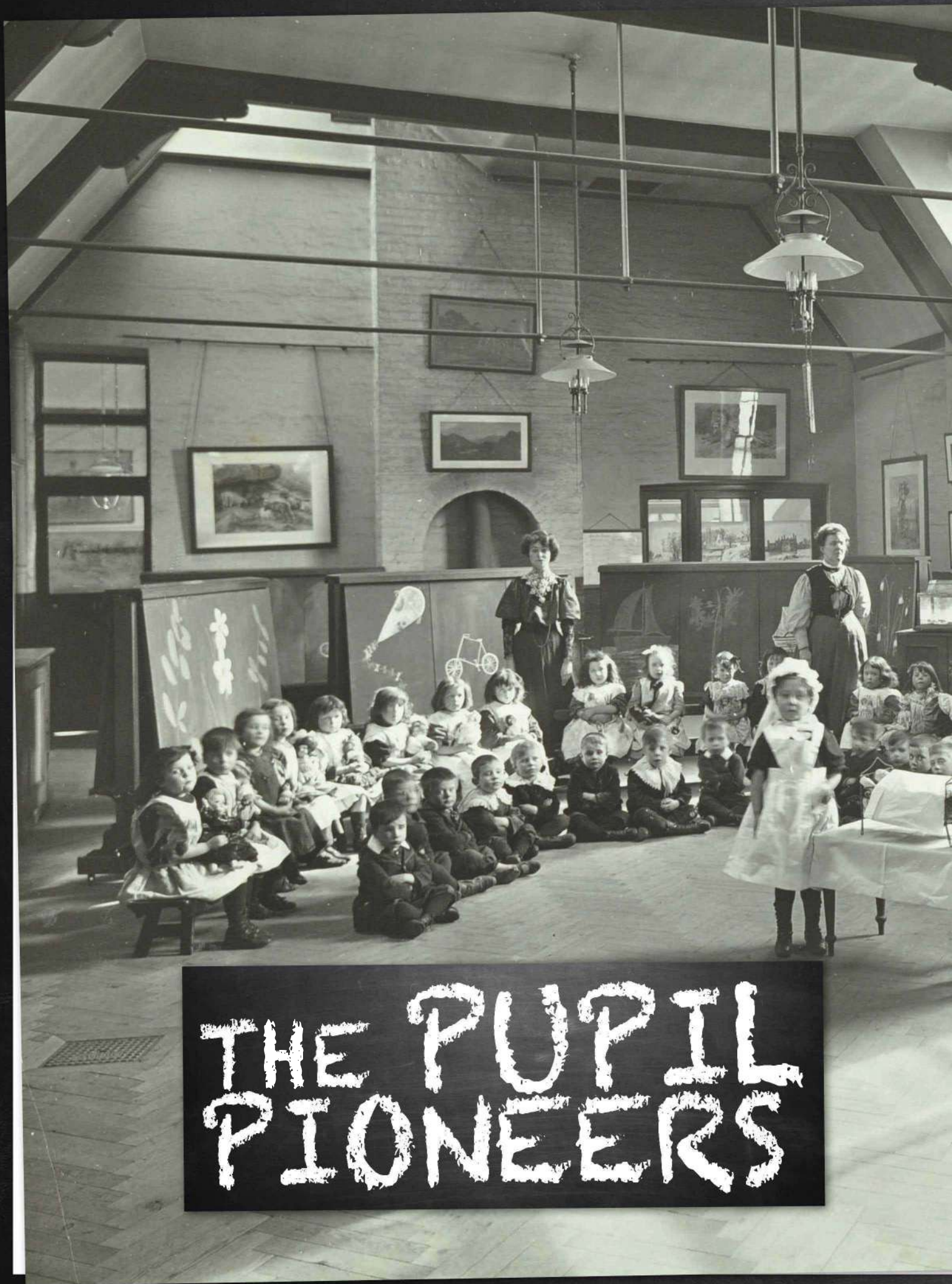

**7 Zoom Right In** You should be able to make out individual houses on 1:2,500 maps, but if a 1:1,250 map is available like the one shown in this screenshot then you can zoom in and make out extra details. Click the 'Map Key' tab at the bottom to bring up the map legend, helping you to identify what's being shown.




**8 Change The View** Click 'Full Screen/Draw' above the map for a distraction-free view; you can click the green 'Georeferenced Maps' button that appears at top right to return to the main view. There are also '3D' and 'Spy' views; the latter offers a 'virtual spyglass' that partially reveals the older map on top of your contemporary map.



**9 Use The Side-By-Side View** You can click the 'Side by Side' button at the top of the screen to view your OS map alongside the contemporary map. As you move one map, the other follows suit. Click 'Swipe ON' above the maps to see a vertical slider; click and drag this left or right to adjust the relative size of each map window.



# THE PUPIL PIONEERS

A drama lesson at Flint Street School, Southwark, South London, 1908

GETTY IMAGES

**Ruth A Symes** explains the gradual roll-out of compulsory education, and what schools were *really* like for pupils in the 19th and early 20th centuries

We could be forgiven for wondering why anyone might think of their time at school as "the best days of my life", considering the many challenges of today's education system – league tables, standard assessment tests (SATs), ageing concrete, a lack of resources, bad behaviour and so on. But having any schooling at all was a hard-won privilege for our ancestors.

In the early part of the 19th century, the children of ordinary working people would not have attended school other than Sunday school at the local church. They might have envied the sons of wealthier families, who, wearing elaborate uniforms, would be taken off by carriage to one of the several large and expensive public boarding schools or grammar schools dotted around the country; or those who learnt something useful at home with a governess; or who studied in one of the many small and unregulated private academies that existed in every town.

## Philanthropic Schools

But the poor had to wait for schooling. Working people only started to get even a look-in on education after schools were gradually set up by two voluntary bodies: the Anglican National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor (formed in 1811) and the nonconformist British and Foreign School Society (which changed its name from the Society for Promoting the Lancasterian System for the Education of the Poor in 1814). Big changes were afoot, however. There were calls for the Government – and not philanthropists – to promote ▶

▶ the religious and moral education (not to mention the literacy) of the labouring classes, and these were finally answered in the early 1830s when the Government started to provide some grants to schools.

Even if our forebears wanted their children to go to school, however, attendance meant one less worker in the family who could bring in an income or help at home. A Royal Commission into children working in mines, set up in 1840, heard many responses along the lines of "I never went to school in my life; I can neither read nor write." As time went on, a number of Acts of Parliament were passed that restricted the number of hours and the ages that young children were allowed to work in factories and mines; schooling would eventually fill the gap.

However, our streets, fields and workplaces only noticeably started to be emptied of youngsters after the 1870 Elementary Education Act, drafted by Liberal MP William Forster. Now, new Government-funded elementary board schools sprang up all over the country with provision to instruct children between the ages of 5 and 13. Still, attendance was not fully compulsory, with parents in rural areas often keeping children of both genders at home to help with the harvest and household chores. It became significantly more difficult to 'bunk off' school 10 years later, when the 1880 Education Act made elementary school mandatory subject to local by-laws, and led to the establishment of school-attendance officers.

## From Fee-paying To Free

Early state schools were not actually free; parents paid a few pence a week, with the exact amount depending on the school. Only with the 1891 Elementary Education Act was the school fee finally done away with. From this point onwards, it can be just about guaranteed that our relations between the ages of 5 and 10 were occupied at school most of the day, five days a week.

The sons and daughters in our families would have entered their schools through separate entrances, and the boys wore uniforms while the girls, until the early 20th century, wore their own clothes. In the early voluntary schools (those not run by a school board), lessons for dozens, if not hundreds, of children were held in large halls. Schoolmasters or mistresses led from the front with monitors (often older pupils) then taking smaller groups to the side of the hall to 'draft stations' marked out in chalk for follow-up instruction.

School halls were dark – windows were placed deliberately high – and noisy. In the early 19th century teachers were in short supply, but as more and more became trained after the introduction of the 'pupil–teacher' system (a sort-of on-the-job apprenticeship scheme) in 1846, physically separate classrooms were built around the original school halls. Spyholes in the doors allowed headteachers to police children and staff.

There was little to entertain our forebears in these early classrooms: the furniture was spartan, and the walls, on the whole, were left bare. To begin with, there were few books other than the Bible, although from the mid-19th century textbooks of all kinds – many of them of dubious quality – started to appear. In place of today's

A needlework sampler made at a school run by the British and Foreign School Society

William Forster MP talks to some of the children whose lives he improved with the 1870 Elementary Education Act

GETTY IMAGES

## Rachel McMillan 1859–1917

**This indefatigable campaigner and trailblazer dedicated her life to improving the health and education of British children**

Older than her more famous sister Margaret by just one year, Rachel McMillan was born in 1859 in New York State to Scottish parents. After the death of their father and sister from scarlet fever, the girls were taken back to Inverness to be educated. Christian Socialists both, the sisters came to understand that there was a strong connection between nutrition, health and educational performance, particularly in the very early years of the life of a poor child.

After a stint working for the Independent Labour Party in Bradford in 1893, Rachel trained as a sanitary inspector and became a teacher of hygiene. In 1907, the sisters led a successful deputation to Parliament calling for health inspections in schools. The following year they set up the world's first school clinic in Bow, East London. Similar clinics in Greenwich and Deptford followed. From 1911, the increasingly innovative approach of the McMillan sisters to education emphasised the need for creative play, physical activity and fresh air in the lives of the young. They established 'camp schools' where children could sleep overnight, bathe and grow vegetables.

The Rachel McMillan Nursery School in Deptford, 21 August 1926

Rachel died on her 58th birthday, 25 March 1917, but was honoured in 1930 when Queen Mary opened the Rachel McMillan Teacher Training College for nursery-school staff, attached to the Rachel McMillan Nursery School in Deptford.

whiteboards, laptops and iPads, there were slates and sharpened slate pencils, a blackboard, an abacus and a globe. Younger children would write with their fingers in trays of sand; older ones in copybooks with ink.

### The Three Rs

Teachers, mainly single women, had little training. Sometimes a lesson in religion would be taught by the local clergyman. Children were taught for six hours a day with a break for lunch during which they were expected to go home to eat; individual lessons were conducted in short stints of 20 minutes or so. There was no properly developed curriculum: the greatest amount of time would be spent on reading, writing and arithmetic, although attempts were gradually made to include other subjects. Our relatives might have come home spouting history as a list of names and dates, or geography as a list of 'capes and bays'. Perhaps they were slightly more inspired by the weekly 'object lesson', in which an apple or flower might be dissected in the classroom and its parts and uses named.

And there were always inspiring teachers such as a Miss Welling in Sussex who, shortly before the start of the First World War, would take her class out into the playground in the summer to act out scenes from British history such as 'Stephen and the Magna Carta', or 'Harold at Hastings'.

**An emphasis on precise repetition left little room for original thought**

Overall, however, memories of school days recorded in working-class autobiographies describe tedious lessons in which an emphasis on precise repetition left little room for original thought. In the afternoon, boys learnt traditionally 'male' skills such as carpentry or gardening, while girls were taught domestic skills such as cookery, needlework, laundry and dairy work.

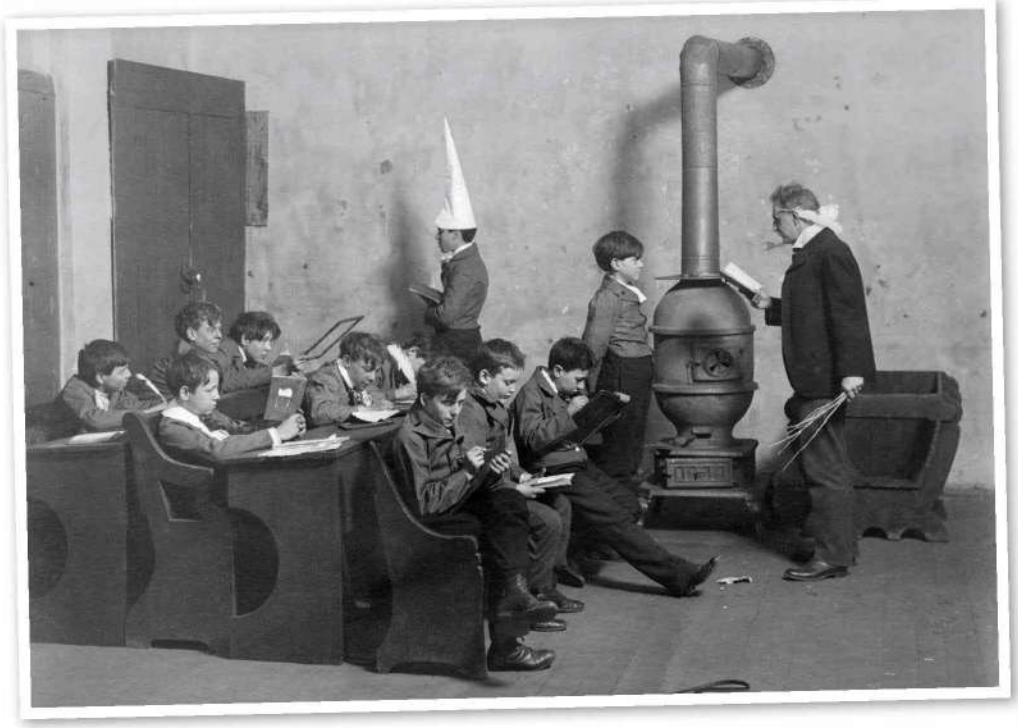
Children learn carpentry and engineering at a school in Wigan, Lancashire, c1900

GETTY IMAGES

In place of today's dreaded SATs, the Revised Code of 1862 set out a list of academic standards that guaranteed a school leaving certificate. Once a year an inspector would visit, no doubt causing staff as much stress as inspections from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) do today. When looking back at her childhood as a pensioner Minnie Frisby (born 1877) wrote, "I left school when I was twelve years old, after reaching 6th Standard which was the highest in those days, after which I could leave." Perhaps by then she had already been kept back a year or two, as was the requirement if the correct standards were not met.

### Increased Leaving Age

If much of this sounds grim, we should remember the saving grace was that children only had to put up with these conditions for a very few years, though the school-leaving age crept up ▶



A reconstruction of how a school lesson might have looked in the early 1800s

incrementally over the years until it finally reached 15 in 1944, when secondary-level education was made available to all.

Our great grandparents might have aspired to earn end-of-term medals and books for good academic performance, but they were probably more likely to have returned home with hands smarting from strikes of the rod or the cane, or cramped from being placed in so-called 'finger stocks'. Detention, lines and the dunce's cap were other means by which teachers kept order. Daisy Cowper (born 1890) recalled that upon returning to school in Toxteth, Liverpool, after being off for several weeks with scarlet fever, she was asked a multiplication question. When she got the sum wrong for the seventh time, the teacher slapped her across the face.

## Another boon for our ancestors was the school medical inspections

### Feeding The Hungry

By the beginning of the 20th century, there were additional advantages to going to school. Reformers argued that children could not be expected to learn on an empty stomach, and from 1906 the Government started to provide a breakfast of porridge, bread and dripping, and milk. In the 1920s, the free meals for all moved to lunchtime when tastier and more substantial fare such as stew and puddings were on offer.

Another boon for our ancestors was the school medical inspections that began in 1907. At their inception, the *Gazette* reported that these would likely pick up "the serious defect in the teeth of the poor, the large number suffering from adenoids and as a result defective hearing, defective chest expansion and defective growth generally".

The inspectors would also consider the child's vision and general nutrition, and their aptitude for certain work.

All in all, it's salutary to remember that for many of our relations, compulsory education provided a welcome counter to difficult conditions they were experiencing at home. No wonder many adults looked back on the time they spent in school as the best days of their lives.

**RUTH A SYMES** is a writer and historian. Her books include *Tracing Your Ancestors Through Letters and Personal Writings* (Pen & Sword, 2016)

# Resources

**Take your research further**

**BOOKS**

*Pioneers in Early Childhood Education, 2nd Edition*
**Patricia Giardiello**
*Routledge, 2022*
This title examines the life and work of the McMillans, Maria Montessori and Susan Isaacs.

*The Victorian and Edwardian Schoolchild*
**Pamela Horn**
*Sutton Publishing, 1989*
Horn's book explores the effects of the 1870 Act. It can be borrowed from the Internet Archive (**tinyurl.com/arch-pam-horn**).

**MUSEUM**

BRITISH SCHOOLS MUSEUM
a **41–42 Queen Street, Hitchin SG4 9TS**
t 01462 420144
e *enquiries@britishschoolsmuseum.org.uk*
w **britishschoolsmuseum.org.uk**
Here you can see a reconstruction of an 1837 monitorial schoolroom.

**WEBSITES**

DISCOVERY
w **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**
You can search The National Archives' catalogue Discovery for material from a particular school held at TNA or elsewhere.

FINDMYPAST
w **bit.ly/fmp-nat-schl**
Findmypast's school records include the collection 'National School Admission Registers & Log-Books 1870–1914'. There are also various school records on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), often from London, and TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**).

WRITING LIVES
w **writinglives.org**
This website includes recollections of school days extracted from memoirs in the Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies at Brunel University London.

GETTY IMAGES

# The Refugee War Hero

**Rosemary Collins** talks to the volunteers who have commemorated a Jewish refugee turned British spy who sacrificed his life for the war effort

The diverse group who attended the unveiling included Kurt's nephew Tony Japhet with his daughter Jemma, shown here to the left of the headstone

The Ipswich War Memorial Project (**ipswichwarmemorial.co.uk**) aims to commemorate all of the men and women from the county town of Suffolk who died in the Second Boer War, the world wars and post-1945 conflicts. The website was founded in 2016 by local researchers Helen Ely and Andrew Beal, and one of the most notable entries concerns a man named Kurt Erich Glauber.

In 2022 Rachel Field, a Suffolk Archives volunteer, researched Jews who came to the county in the 1930s to escape Nazi persecution, as part of the project 'We Have to Move On' (**www.suffolkarchives.co.uk/sharing-suffolk-stories/we-have-to-move-on/**).

Family history website Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has a collection of records of Second World War refugees in the UK, including those who were interned by the Government. Searching this collection, Rachel found a December 1939 record for Kurt Erich Glauber. He had been born on 23 December 1902 in Vienna, Austria, but was now living at 277 Norwich Road in Ipswich and working in a laundry, although he had been a solicitor in Vienna. Also, a tribunal had decided that he was exempt from internment. Intrigued, Rachel did some more digging and uncovered the full story.

Kurt had arrived in England in 1938. In 1941 he joined the Pioneer Corps, an unarmed unit of the British Army that performed such tasks as clearing mines and digging trenches. In 1943, the Government allowed refugees to join fighting units. The official records show that Kurt joined the Royal Artillery, but this was a cover story. In fact, he was recruited by MI6 to work as a spy.

Kurt was parachuted into Central Europe, and made his way alone to Vienna. He was a good choice for the mission because of his contacts and knowledge of the city, and could 'pass' as a gentile thanks to his blond hair and blue eyes. He is thought to have been investigating factories where the Nazis were potentially developing nuclear weapons. He was hidden by opera singer Daniza Illitsch and her sister Rada at their apartment. Daniza was one of a number of musicians at the Vienna Opera House who were involved in the resistance movement.

Kurt and the Illitsch sisters were then betrayed by a woman who had let British agents use her lodgings as a safe house, and they were captured by the Gestapo. Kurt died in Mauthausen concentration camp in April 1945. The sisters were held in another camp, which was liberated the same month.

Rachel contacted Helen and Andrew with her findings. They published Kurt's story on their site, and in April 2023 shared it on their Facebook page (**tinyurl.com/fb-ip-war-mem**). The post reached Martin Sugarman of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women of the UK (AJEX; **ajex.org.uk**). Martin works with the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation (JASHP; **jewish-american-society-for-historic-preservation.org**) to place historical interpretive markers and memorials reflecting on the British Jewish experience. Martin got in touch with Helen and Andrew, and told them that JASHP would like to erect a memorial for Kurt.

**This is a life story that should be told, honoured and never forgotten**

In September 2023, a headstone for Kurt was unveiled at Ipswich Old Cemetery. The ceremony was conducted by Rabbi Geoffrey Hyman, and attended by Kurt's nephew Tony Japhet, the son of his sister who came to England separately, and his daughter Jemma, as well as Bernhard Wrabetz, the Austrian ambassador to Britain; Lynne Mortimer, the mayor of Ipswich; and Mark Brennan, a deputy lieutenant of Suffolk.

Helen sums it up perfectly when she says, "This is a wonderful, albeit sad, life story, that should be told, honoured and never forgotten."

**TELL YOUR STORY**

**Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

## Find Out More

### Ipswich War Memorial Project

w **ipswichwarmemorial.co.uk**

Helen and Andrew share stories from the website via their Facebook group (**tinyurl.com/fb-ip-war-mem**). If you have any photos of a member of your family who came from Ipswich and died in the world wars, please get in touch using the contact form on the website.

# 'Smokescreens Concealed Mum's True Parentage'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Peter Vonlanthen spent decades trying to prove that he is genetically a member of the family that he grew up with, until DNA testing finally solved the enigma. By **Gail Dixon**

Having an illegitimate child in India during the early 20th century often led to scandal and disgrace. Some parents created stories, or 'smokescreens', to hide the truth from their relations and employers. Here Peter Vonlanthen, who has been researching his roots for most of his adult life, explains how he unravelled the complicated mystery behind his mother's birth.

**PETER VONLANTHEN** is a retired chartered accountant and senior lecturer who lives in Te Awamutu on New Zealand's North Island

## My Brick Wall

I was born in New Zealand in 1942 to a Swiss farmer Frank Vonlanthen and his wife Ruth Anna Ayo, a nurse of Anglo-Indian origin. Ruth was born in 1918 in Allahabad (now Prayagraj) in Uttar Pradesh, a state in northern India.

Her mother was Elizabeth Charles (family name Lena) who married mail-train driver Richard Ayo in Allahabad in 1908.

The couple had six children – Richard and Stanley, both of whom died young, then Myrtle, Ivy, Richard and George.

Sadly, in 1917 Richard senior died at the age of 36 as a result of peritonitis (abdominal inflammation). Lena and the children moved into the Ayo family compound in Allahabad, where Ruth was born in 1918.

At some point after Richard's death, Lena began a relationship with Richard's brother Duncan. They had two sons, Kenneth and Dudley, who were born in 1925 and 1927 respectively.

I've yet to find a marriage certificate for Lena and Duncan. Lena became a matron after serving in a military hospital, while Duncan was headteacher of an Anglican school. Any whiff of scandal could have compromised both their careers.

Duncan and Lena emigrated to New Zealand in 1933, taking Ruth and the younger children with them, although the older siblings stayed on in India for several more years.

My parents' marriage ended when I was six months old. This meant that I went to live with Lena in 1942 while Ruth continued her nurse's training.

In 1958, Lena told me that she had adopted Ruth, explaining that her French cousin had had an affair with an Indian judge and died soon after giving birth to her. Thank goodness I didn't ask my mother about this.

Another smokescreen emerged in the 1960s, when Myrtle (married name Williams) said that Lena told her that Ruth was the daughter of the children's nanny.

Ivy (married name Sabbage) offered yet another version of events – that Lena's close friend Mary Lawrence was Ruth's mother, and after Mary's death in 1919 Ruth had been placed in an orphanage in Simla (now Shimla).

Myrtle and Ivy were sent to boarding school while Lena was pregnant with Ruth, and she had very little contact with any of her siblings throughout adulthood.

Mum died of cancer in 1963, when I was 21. She grew up believing that Duncan was her

## Researching Forebears In India

These three websites can help you explore the lives of British relations in India

### Families In British India Society

w **fibis.org**

According to FIBIS, over three million British people lived and worked in India between 1600 and 1947. The society's online database contains more than two million names.

### Findmypast

w **tinyurl.com/fmp-brit-ind-coll**

The British India Office collection includes records of military personnel and civil servants back to the 1600s. You can also search wills, pensions, births, marriages and deaths.

### National Archives Of India

w **https://nationalarchives.nic.in**

Established in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1891, the National Archives is a great starting point for tracing the lives of British people who lived in India during the Raj.

SUPREME COURT, AUCKLAND.
Vonlanthen v. — Exhibit 1941. A.

NEW ZEALAND

COPY OF REGISTER OF MARRIAGE

№ 437

Marriage in the District of HAMILTON.

| No. | When and where married | Names and Surnames of the Parties | Ages | Rank or Profession | Condition of Parties | Birthplace | Residence 1. Present 2. Usual | Father's Name and Surname (1) and his Rank or Profession (2) | Mother's Name and Maiden Surname |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. | 1st February 1941. Our Lady of the Rosary Roman Catholic Church, Hamilton. | Frank Vonlanthen | 34 | Farmer | 1. Bachelor | Switzerland | 1. Hamilton 2. Hamilton | 1. John Joseph Vonlanthen 2. Farmer | 1. Anna Vonla… 2. Fonth… |
| | | Ruth Anna Ayo | 22 | – | 1. Spinster | India | 1. Hamilton 2. Hamilton | 1. Richard Ayo 2. Mail Train Driver | 1. Lena Ay… 2. Charle… |

Married, after the delivery to me of the Certificate required by the Marriage Act, 1908, by Michael J. Bleakley, Officiating Minister [or Reg…

This Marriage was solemnized between us, Frank Vonlanthen, Ruth Anna Ayo

In the presence of us, Lena Ayo, Hamilton, Married. T.D. Ayo, Hamilton, School Master.

I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of an entry of Marriage in the records of my office. Given under my hand at Wellington, this 19th day of December

(The fee for this certificate is 2/6.) CAUTION.—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses it as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to prosecution under the Crimes Act, 1908.

Deputy Registrar-Gen…

The marriage record of Peter's parents states that Ruth's parents were Richard and Lena Ayo

Peter's mother Ruth worked as a nurse

father, but had little to do with him in life. I also discovered that when Ruth married she gave Richard Ayo's name as her father on her marriage certificate. So who were Ruth's true parents?

## My Eureka Moment

Between 1958 and 2018, I researched every avenue and enlisted the help of genealogists. Each of the stories I'd been told led to a dead end.

In 2020, I decided to take an AncestryDNA test (**ancestry.co.uk/dna**). I had strong matches with Lena's grandson Glenn Ayo and her great grandchildren Paula and Chris Williams.

Ruth's younger brother Dudley is still alive aged 97, and he agreed to take a test. Dudley and I shared 1,756 cM, which crucially linked me with his father Duncan.

My genealogist cousin Geraldine Charles recommended that I obtain a DNA test from an Ayo unconnected with Lena. This is where Dudley's second cousin Roland Ayo, of Sydney, Australia, came in; he is the grandson of James Samuel Ayo, the brother of Richard and Duncan. Eureka! Roland's results matched with Dudley, Glenn and my DNA. This proved definitively that I am descended from the Ayo family.

Relatives descended from Lena's first husband Richard had much lower DNA matches with me, which suggested that Richard wasn't Ruth's father. By this point, I felt sure that Duncan and Lena were Ruth's biological parents and my grandparents.

Why did Ruth put Richard's name on her marriage certificate? It's my belief that Lena gave the required information to Ruth at that point as part of the smokescreen. This must have challenged everything Ruth believed about her past.

## My Breakthrough

Remarkably, an India Office record revealed that Duncan and Lena formally adopted Ruth in 1924. Therefore, she was adopted by her biological parents.

Finally, I could piece together my mother's complex story. After Richard Ayo died in 1917, Lena and Duncan must have begun their relationship and conceived my mother. The truth would have caused a scandal, so Ruth was fostered as a baby by Mary Lawrence, and placed in the orphanage after she died. For propriety's sake, Lena and Duncan pretended to family that Ruth was an adoptee.

It's good to know that there is a science, DNA, that can be relied upon in such circumstances. It's also a relief to know that I am genetically a member of the family I've spent my whole life with.

**HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?**

**Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!**

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

BAPTISMS Solemnized at Allahabad in connection with the Church of Scotland.

| When Baptized Year | Month | Day | Said to be Born Year | Month | Day | Child's Christian Name | Sex | Parents' Names Christian | Surname | Abode of parents | Quality Trade or Profession of Father | Name of Priest or Minister by whom the Ceremony was performed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1892 | Sept | 27th | 1892 | July | 30th | Bryan Reginald Gill | Male | Charles … & Elvina Margaret | … | Allahabad | … Board of Rev. … | James M. Alexander MD, American Presbyterian Mission |
| 1892 | Sept | 1st | 1892 | March | 15th | Thomas Duncan | Male | James & Emma | Ayo | Allahabad | Permanent Sergeant | James M. Alexander MD, Am. Presbyterian Mission |
| 1892 | Sept | 18th | 1892 | Aug | 7th | George Beckman | Male | Samuel & Alice Amelia | Pigott | Allahabad | Clerk, … Office | … Asst Chaplain, Church of Scotland |

I, George … Clarke do hereby certify that the foregoing are true & faithful copies of all entries in the Register of Baptisms in connection with the Church of Scotland kept at Allahabad, as therein entered & made, between the first day of July & the thirtieth day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and ninety two. Witness my hand, … Clarke, Asst Chaplain, Church of Scotland

Allahabad 3rd October 1892.

217

According to his 1892 baptism record Ruth's biological father Duncan Ayo was born Thomas Duncan Ayo

## Reader Tips

**What advice does Peter have for solving genealogical mysteries?**

- Before starting your analysis, try to amass as much information as you possibly can.
- Don't take online family trees as gospel, because there will always be errors or omissions.
- Obtain DNA from a father and mother's separate sides to reach a valid conclusion.

# MERCHANDISE

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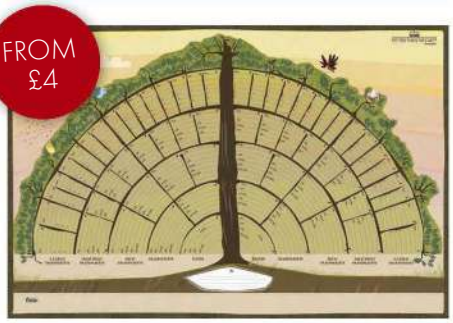

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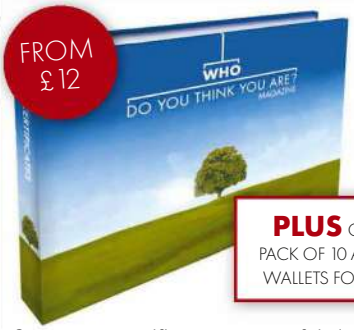


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The Priory Church of St Peter in Dunstable, where Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon was annulled

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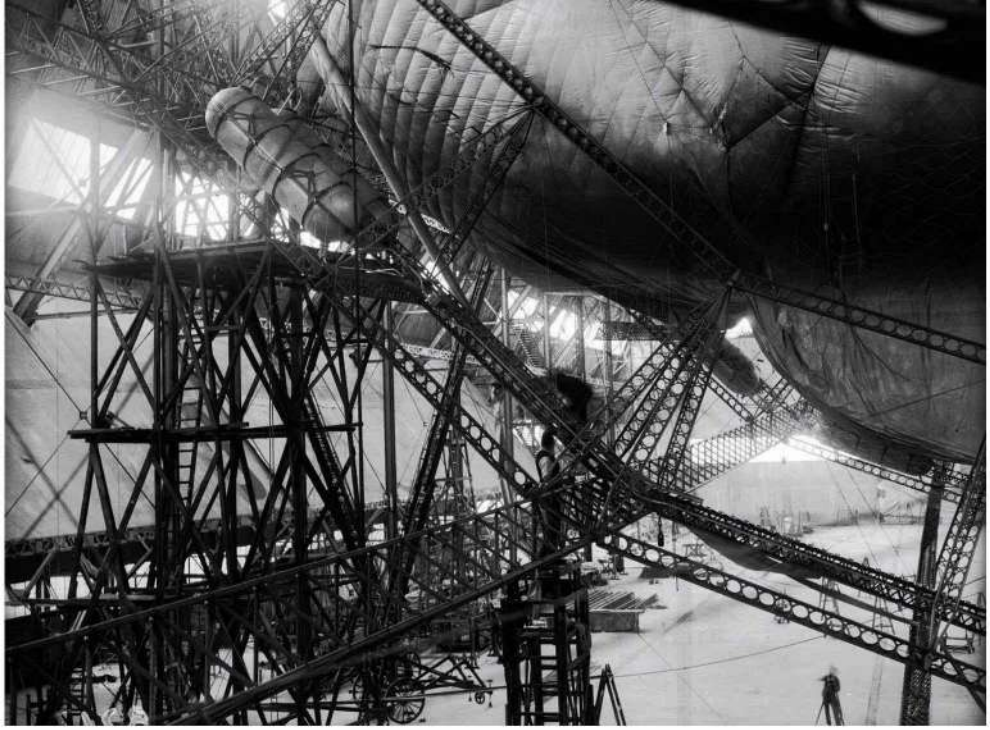
## Around Britain

# Bedfordshire

**Jonathan Scott** reveals the latest news about the resources to research your Bedfordshire relations



The rigid airship R101 under construction at the Royal Airship Works in Cardington in August 1928

Luton Town Football Club has a longstanding claim to fame. During one match in 1936 the team put 12 goals past Bristol Rovers, 10 of which came from Joe Payne. This remains the most goals scored by one player in a Football League match.

The club's nickname is 'the Hatters', and the success of the hat-making trade transformed the market town into a hive of industry known across the world. According to the website of Wardown House, Museum and Gallery (**culturetrust.com/venues/wardown-house-museum-gallery**), during the 1800s there were more than 400 hat factories in Luton, the majority making straw hats. The museum not only has thousands of pieces of headgear and rare items relating to the industry, but also an archive of sources including an almost complete run of the *Hatter's Gazette*.

You can follow the industry's development over time in the pages of the historic trade directories available digitally via the University of Leicester's website Special Collections Online (**tinyurl.com/sco-dir-beds**), and records from some firms have ended up at the county record office in Bedford (**bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Archives-Service.aspx**).

Compared with some English counties, not all that much parish material for Bedfordshire is available through commercial websites. It is definitely worth exploring the various collections on the free website FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**) and the 277,892 (and counting) register entries on FreeREG (**freereg.org.uk**). You can order copies direct from Bedfordshire Archives, or there's the long-running series of parish transcriptions published by Bedfordshire Family History Society (**bfhs.org.uk**).

**Staff are creating an index to 19th-century case files from the Three Counties Asylum**

## Major Ancestry Collection

Ancestry has various other Bedfordshire sources on its books, including censuses, land-tax and valuation records, petty-sessions records, workhouse and Poor Law material, and electoral registers back to 1832 (**ancestry.co.uk/search/places/united_kingdom/england/bedfordshire/**). Meanwhile Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) has census material, pre-1914 school logbooks and admission registers, and an index to probate records (1484–1858) based on two volumes published by the British Record Society (**bit.ly/fmp-eng-wales-will-probate**).

The county archive has created some research tools in-house. Digitised and free-to-view 1920s valuation maps, for example, are very useful if you're researching the history of a building, while a database of registers from Bedford Gaol covers 1770–1904 and boasts about 45,000 entries (**https://apps.bedford.gov.uk/grd/**).

There's more material on the

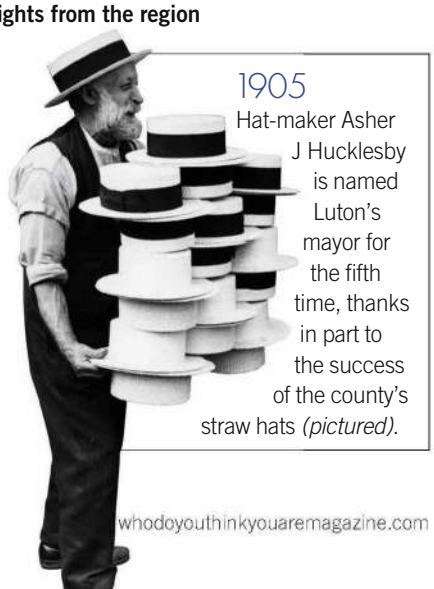
## Bedfordshire Through The Ages

**Historical highlights from the region**

**1086**
Luton is recorded as "Loitone" in the Domesday survey. The settlement already has a population of roughly 700 people.

**1855**
Farmer William Jordan buys Holme Mills in Biggleswade. This will become the home of food brand Jordans Cereals.

**1876**
Charles Wells starts brewing on the banks of the River Ouse in Bedford. The brewery, and most of its beer brands, are sold to Marston's for £55 million in 2017.



**1905**
Hat-maker Asher J Hucklesby is named Luton's mayor for the fifth time, thanks in part to the success of the county's straw hats *(pictured)*.

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horizon too. County archivist Pamela Birch, who we interviewed for our 'Gem From the Archive' article in June, reports that through financial support from Bedfordshire Family History Society, staff are creating an index to 19th-century case files from the Three Counties Asylum, which should be finished by November.

"We had assumed that all patients had a case file, but this proved not to be so. The new index will help us to answer family history inquiries more quickly and accurately. It will also provide a way of searching the information by age, reason for hospitalisation (to a degree) and location. The asylum served Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Huntingdonshire, and patients came from elsewhere too."

The online catalogue contains many thousands of names: **https://bedsarchivescat.bedford.gov.uk**. These include references in records of 19th-century quarter sessions, and volunteers have also produced a basic index to will and probate collections.

"Another project that is close to a conclusion is the listing of all of our marriage-licence allegations and bonds onto the catalogue."

The more unusual holdings here include a list of inhabitants from the village of Stotfold, compiled by a vicar in 1860.

## Online Treasure Trove

The 'Community Histories' section of the archive's website is a parish-by-parish treasure trove, with details of important buildings, churches, schools and one-off sources. For example, clicking the quiet village of Swineshead on the interactive map, or its entry in a list of place names, leads to an enclosure map of 1808; Ordnance Survey maps from the turn of the century; information about individual cottages and farmhouses; an inventory of church furniture from 1634; a list of local rectors back to 1272; and details of the former Old Five Bells public house, including a list of licensees.

Bedfordshire was divided into six Poor Law Unions – Ampthill, Bedford, Biggleswade, Leighton Buzzard, Luton and Woburn – although some parishes came

# Free Online Records

This month's free resources include parish registers, names from war memorials, maps from the 1920s, memorial inscriptions and details of the local clergy

### Maps

w **bit.ly/bedford-maps**

Here you can browse detailed maps that were drawn up to survey the taxable value of land in the mid-1920s.

### Clergy Index

w **tinyurl.com/beds-arch-cat-sch**

All of the recorded parish clergy for the county are named in the county archive's catalogue. Enter 'Fasti' in the 'Reference' field for lists organised by parish.

### Memorial Inscriptions

w **roxton-grave-memorials.org.uk**

This site includes a detailed survey and transcriptions of gravestones at the church of St Mary Magdalene in Roxton *(pictured)*. You can also search burials in Stotfold back to 1898 at **www.stotfoldtowncouncil.gov.uk/Cemetery_22393.aspx**.

### War Memorials

w **roll-of-honour.com/Bedfordshire/**

Explore photographed and transcribed war memorials found throughout the county, from the village green at Eaton Socon, to the Church of St Mary the Virgin in Meppershall.

### Parish Registers

w **tinyurl.com/fs-wiki-beds**

This FamilySearch wiki lists some of its Bedfordshire resources, such as parish registers (1538–1983).

## 1941

The BBC begins wartime broadcasts from venues across Bedford, including performances by American big-band leader Glenn Miller *(pictured)* and singer Vera Lynn, the Forces' sweetheart, in the town's Corn Exchange.

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## 1963

A gang of 15 men steal £2.6 million from a Royal Mail train *(pictured)* at Bridego Bridge, near Leighton Buzzard. The crime becomes known as the Great Train Robbery.

## 1968

Bedford-born actor John Le Mesurier joins the cast of BBC One's sitcom *Dad's Army*, playing Sergeant Arthur Wilson.

## 2023

Universal Studios buys 480 acres near the model village of Stewartby including the site of a former brickworks, with a view to building a theme park and resort.

Biggleswade-born manufacturer Dan Albone's tractor the Ivel, photographed c1900

under the jurisdiction of the St Neot's Union, whose records are held by Huntingdonshire Archives (**tinyurl.com/cambs-gov-hunt-arch**). Volunteers have just begun work on a project to index Poor Law Union correspondence from the Bedford Union in the mid-19th century, and you can find out more at the website Projects, Poverty and the Poor Under the Poor Laws: **https://intheirownwriteblog.wordpress.com/when-more-was-said-than-done-2023-to-2025/**.

While Bedfordshire is associated with hatters, straw plaiters and lacemakers, the county was also the home of some engineering and heavy-industry firms, such as Grafton Cranes of Bedford and Howards, which manufactured farm machinery at the town's huge Britannia Iron Works. Another volunteer is currently sorting and cataloguing material relating to the vast brickworks at Stewartby, and also developing ideas to help mark the model village's centenary in 2026.

Pamela also recommends the website of the Bedfordshire Local History Association (**bedfordshire-lha.org.uk**), which might help you find projects and groups covering the area you're researching, and the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**), whose catalogue includes the likes of the *Luton Reporter*, *Bedfordshire Mercury* and *Biggleswade Chronicle*.

### Walking With Archivists

Since May archivists have been leading walking tours in four locations in Bedfordshire, all financed by an engagement grant from The National Archives at Kew. They're also planning to create resources for encouraging historic trail walks.

Finally, one recent acquisition is a collection of funeral directors' registers from the town of Kempston. Pamela says, "Again we have Bedfordshire Family History Society to thank, because it was due to their ongoing project indexing funeral registers that the original records came to be deposited with us."

**TOP TIP!**

The site **worldwar1luton.com** has details of soldiers and civilians compiled from the 1918 Absent Voters' List, rolls of honour and information uploaded by volunteers and the public.

**LOCAL INDUSTRY**

## Vauxhall Motors The county has long been a centre of vehicle manufacturing

Workers in the Vauxhall Motors factory in Luton, 1935

This ironworks in Vauxhall, South London, started building cars in 1903 with a five-horsepower model boasting a single cylinder, two gears and no reverse. In 1904 the firm began production at a new site in Luton, where the first commercial vehicle carrying the Bedford marque was made in 1929. Bedfordshire Archives (**bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Archives-Service.aspx**) has a range of material including staff magazines, and there are vintage vehicles at the British Motor Museum in Gaydon, Warwickshire (**britishmotormuseum.co.uk**).

## Bedfordshire Surnames

Are any of these in your family tree?

### BREED
Breed is a locative name for someone who lived by a broad strip of cultivated land.

### BRIGHTMAN
This is a relationship name taken from the Old English personal name Brihtmann/Beorhtmann.

### FOSSEY
Fossey is thought to stem from a lost place called Fotsey in the Bedfordshire parish of Aspley Guise.

### HUCKELL/HUCKLE
This may derive from the personal name Huck.

### KEECH
This nickname for an overweight person comes from a Middle English word for a lump of fat.

### O'DELL/ODELL
Both variants originated in the small village Odell in the north of the county.

### PUDDEPHATT
This nickname is thought to come from a Middle English word for something swollen or obese.

### PURSER
Purser is an occupational name from someone who made purses, or a burser/treasurer.

### WILDMAN
This was a nickname for someone unrestrained.

### WOODING
Most of the Woodings recorded in the 1881 census were living in Bedfordshire or Northamptonshire.

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# BEDFORDSHIRE DIRECTORY

## ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES

### Bedfordshire Archives

a **Riverside Building, Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford MK42 9AP**
t 01234 228833
e *archive@bedford.gov.uk*
w **bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/Archives-Service.aspx**

This diocesan record office holds parish registers for the county as well as Old Poor Law material, plus catalogued and indexed quarter-session rolls, pre-1858 wills proved at Bedford, business collections and records of the county regiment. Note that all visits are by appointment only.

### Bedford Central Library

a **Harpur Street, Bedford MK40 1PG**
t 01234 718178
w **www.bedford.gov.uk/libraries/your-local-library-opening-times-facilities-and-activities/bedford-central-library**

Local sources here include parish registers and census material on microfilm, together with cemetery records, electoral registers and indexed local newspapers.

### Cambridgeshire Archives

a **The Dock, Ely CB7 4GS**
t 01223 699399
e *cambs.archives@cambridgeshire.gov.uk*
w **https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/archives/visit-the-archives/cambridgeshire-archives**

It's always worth checking the jurisdiction and coverage of certain types of records, because some relevant material for Bedfordshire may have ended up in neighbouring repositories – for example Cambridgeshire Archives' office in Ely.

### Luton Libraries

t 01582 547418
e *info@lutonlibraries.co.uk*
w **https://www.lutonlibraries.co.uk/digital-content/libraries/branch-information**

This website gives details of five libraries in Luton, including the main central library which reopened in April this year following redevelopment (Luton Central Library, St George's Square, Luton LU1 2NG; 01582 256666). Local-studies material includes books, pamphlets, cuttings and newspapers on microfilm back to 1874.

### The Virtual Library

w **https://virtual-library.culturalservices.net/bedfordshire/vlib/0.local_studies/local_studies_a_z.htm**

This website is the best place to read about specific local and family history collections held at libraries across Bedfordshire. Biggleswade Library, for example, reopened following a revamp in 2023 and has indexed burial and cemetery records from the area, while Dunstable Library has Methodist baptisms from Dunstable and Luton.

### University Of Bedfordshire Special Collections

a **Bedford Campus Library, Polhill Avenue, Bedford MK41 9EA**
t 01234 793189
e *library.services@beds.ac.uk*
w **https://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/specialcollections/**

The material here includes the Levick Boyd Archive for Women's Lacrosse and the Bedford Physical Education Archive, from the Bedford Physical Training College's creation in 1903.

## GROUPS & SOCIETIES

### Bedfordshire Family History Society

w **bfhs.org.uk**

The society's website details its latest meetings, publications and projects, including the ongoing work to create digital copies of local funeral directors' ledgers. You can also search a free surname index based on those published in the society's journal.

### Bedfordshire Historical Record Society

w **bedfordshirehrs.org.uk**

Here you can search an index to volumes published by the society since it was founded in 1912.

### Bedfordshire Local History Association

w **bedfordshire-lha.org.uk**

This is the place to see if any local history groups cover the region you're researching.

## MUSEUMS

### Military Intelligence Museum

a **Chicksands, Shefford SG17 5PR**
t 01462 752896
e *visits-intelligencemuseum@outlook.com*
w **militaryintelligencemuseum.org**

This appointment-only museum located on a working military base tells the story of British military intelligence back to the Second Boer War (1899–1902).

### The Higgins Bedford

a **Castle Lane, Bedford MK40 3XD**
t 01234 718618
e *thehiggins@bedford.gov.uk*
w **thehigginsbedford.org.uk**

The museum shares the stories of the people and the places that have shaped Bedford.

### Wardown House, Museum And Gallery

a **Old Bedford Road, Luton LU2 7HA**
t 01582 546722
e *museum.gallery@culturetrust.com*
w **culturetrust.com/venues/wardown-house-museum-gallery**

The museum preserves objects and archives relating to the English hat industry including many issues of the *Hatter's Gazette*, and you can take a virtual tour on its website.

## WEBSITE

### Ancestry

w **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61264**

Ancestry's electoral registers for Bedfordshire from 1832–1986 include nearly 18 million names.

# Letters from William Wilberforce, 1799–1800

**Deborah Jenkins** from the Royal Berkshire Archives shares letters that abolitionist William Wilberforce sent to the MP for Reading Interview By Rosemary Collins

The Royal Berkshire Archives holds a set of papers, dating from 1611–1855, relating to the Simeon family. Richard Simeon was a Reading lawyer whose sons John, Edward and Charles achieved notability respectively as the MP for Reading, a director of the Bank of England and an evangelical minister. Among the papers are correspondence between John Simeon and William Wilberforce, also an MP and famous for his campaign to abolish the slave trade. As Deborah Jenkins, a volunteer at the archive, explains, the letters reveal a debate about a church in Reading that sheds light on religious divisions at the time.

## Can You Describe The Letters To Our Readers?

These three letters, which are dated 1799–1800, were sent by William Wilberforce (1759–1833) to Sir John Simeon, 1st Baronet (1756–1824), MP for Reading, and provide a detailed insight into the split into two factions of the congregation of the parish of St Giles in Reading in 1797. For Wilberforce and Simeon, this apparently local issue was of national relevance. To them the reform of the Anglican church was fundamental.

Between 1768 and 1797 St Giles' Church had provided Reading with a place of worship in the evangelical tradition, but matters changed when the newly appointed Rev. Joseph Eyre tried to impose conventional Anglican forms of worship. At that point, part of the congregation built a new chapel on the site of the former county gaol. Although this new congregation and its ministers still saw themselves as Anglican, opposition from members of the local clergy prevented its recognition as a 'proprietary chapel' within the Church of England.

In the first letter, dated 21 August 1799, Wilberforce proposes giving up to £100 to support the new chapel, arguing that providing the pro-evangelical congregation with a place to worship within the Church of England would prevent "Schismatics", or their separation from the Church. However, in the last letter, dated 7 January 1800, he has changed his mind, refusing to support the formation of a separate chapel because he worries that doing so would harm his reputation: "[I]f I were once suspected to be but a false Brother of the Church, if my zeal for it were ever brought into question, I should cease to be capable of rendering any services [to Evangelical ministers within the Church of England]… Therefore my duty manifestly is, to avoid whatever (not being matter of absolute & clear obligation) might, even by Perversion or Misconstruction, be turn'd into an argument to prove me too well affected to the dissenters or too closely connected with them."

**Wilberforce proposes giving up to £100 to support the new chapel**

## Why Did You Choose Them As Your Gem?

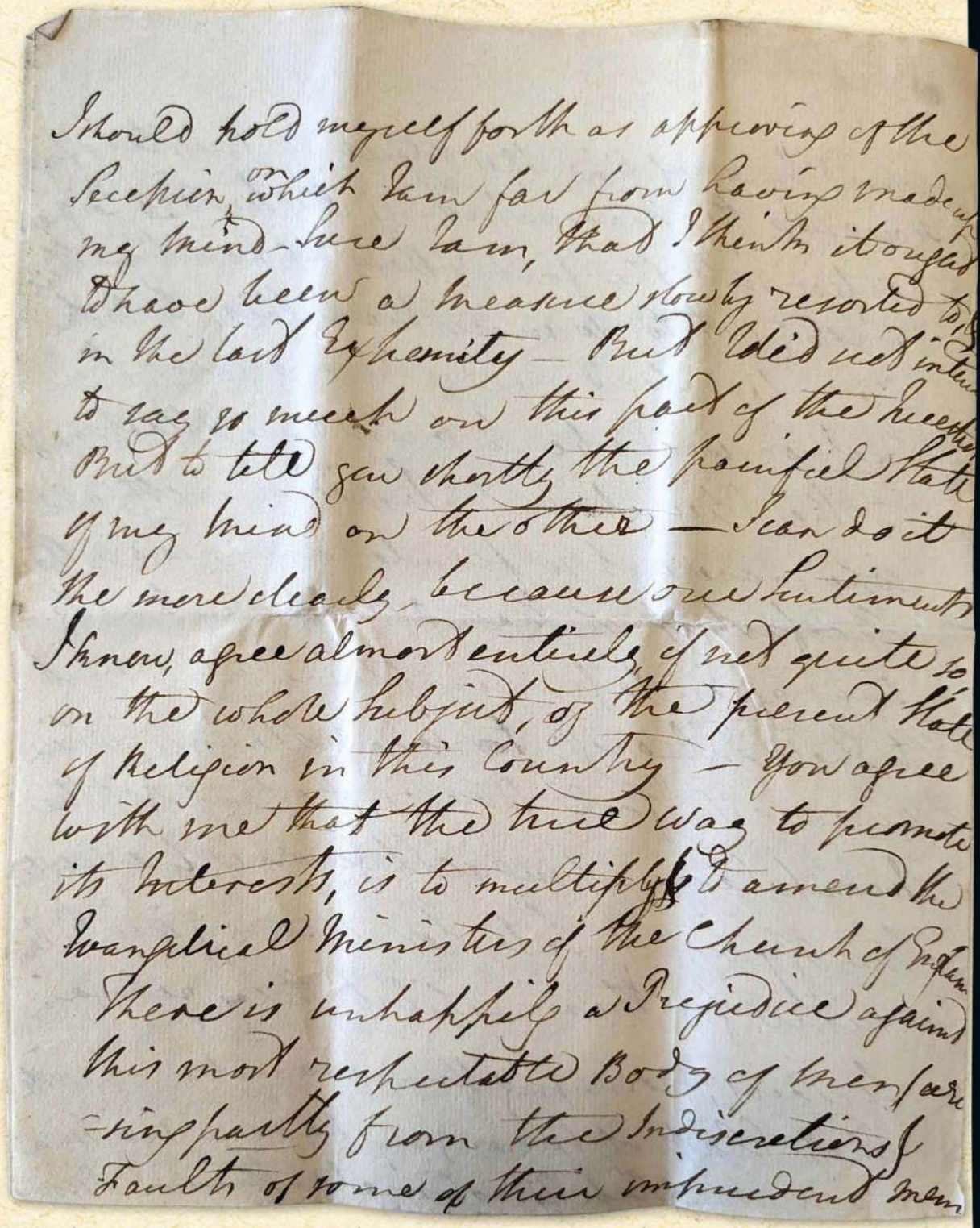
Of course, Wilberforce is best known for his commitment to the abolition of slavery and other causes, such as missionary work in India, the creation of a free colony in Sierra Leone, and founding the Society for the Suppression of Vice, in addition to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. It is, therefore, rather unexpected to see him acting in a local context – "the Reading Affair", as he calls it. Wilberforce was not the only national personality involved, which shows the significance of the issue. He mentions that Henry Addington, then speaker of the House of Commons and a future prime minister (1801–1804), who was also a Reading man, might be a supporter of the chapel, and worries that the current prime minister William Pitt has been prejudiced against evangelical ministers.

For the local historian the letters are an interesting source, reflecting the tensions between the artisan and shopkeeping class of Reading and the wealthier landowning parliamentary elite, at a time when the

## Visit Us

The Royal Berkshire Archives
a 9 Coley Avenue, Reading RG1 6AF
t 0118 937 5132
w royalberkshirearchives.org.uk/visit-us/planning-a-visit

The archive is open Tuesday to Thursday, 9am–5pm (until 9pm one Thursday each month), and Friday, 9am–4.30pm. Visitors must make appointments at least two working days in advance, and you will need to bring an Archives Card or sufficient ID to qualify for a Day Pass to view original documents.



I should hold myself forth as approving of the Secession which I am far from having made up my mind – but I am glad that there has been a measure slowly resorted to in the last Extremity – But I did not intend to say so much on this part of the subject but to tell you shortly the painful state of my mind on the other – I can do it the more clearly, because our sentiments I know, agree almost entirely if not quite so on the whole subject of the present state of Religion in this Country – You agree with me that the true way to promote its interests, is to multiply & to animate the Evangelical Ministers of the Church of England There is unhappily a Prejudice against this most respectable Body of men / arising partly from the Indiscretions & Faults of some of their imprudent men

French Revolution cast a long shadow on British politics.

The tone of the letters, which seem to have been dashed off at speed, is friendly, humorous and discursive – one might say 'pre-Victorian' in its openness. Wilberforce describes inner feelings, emotions and social hesitations: "to say nothing (which however I feel to be important) of the incompetency of myself, for one, to execute the office… for them… from my unacquaintedness with that Class of men & my having no measure by which to estimate them".

The letters also illuminate Wilberforce's personal life. He writes about his health, apologising for not writing sooner because he suffered from "2 or 3 attacks of a feverish kind, which tho' not very severe, have yet been sufficient to shake my weakly frame". They also show his affection for his family, as he writes to Simeon: "I can ascribe it only to your affect[ing] to be plunged in an impenetrable retirement while buried in your Lodge at Mapledurham, that you were unacquainted with the tidings of Mrs W. having brought me a Daughter on the very day of the month on which the year before our son made his appearance. Both mother & child I thank God have uniformly done well. Indeed I can never be sufficiently thankful for all the many instances I experience of the Bounty of providence & of all these, my thanks are peculiarly due for my domestic comforts, the best blessings this world can afford, next to that 'peace & joy in believing'."

## What Other Material Does The Archive Hold?

The Royal Berkshire Archives holds records from public authorities and private organisations from across the county, dating from the 12th century all the way up to the present day. Notable collections include the archives of Broadmoor Hospital, Reading Prison and the Thames Conservancy, although most collections come from the people and organisations that live and work in Berkshire, including many personal letters and accounts. I've read many interesting letters in our collections, including one written by a soldier on the eve of the siege of Sebastopol during the Crimean War (1853–1856), and a letter that a woman sent to her married sister in 1929 advising her to read Marie Stopes' books about contraception.

# REVIEWS

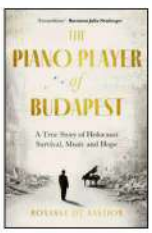
The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

Clockwise from inset: the book's author Roxanne de Bastion; her grandfather Stephen de Bastion; Stephen accompanies Hungarian-American singer Alvia Suli, who he performed with in 1938–1939; Stephen, Alvia and *(left)* their drummer

## The Piano Player Of Budapest

### A True Story Of Holocaust Survival, Music And Hope

**Roxanne de Bastion**
*Robinson, 288 pages, £22*




As far back as she can remember, singer–songwriter Roxanne de Bastion's father owned a Blüthner baby grand piano, which had been in his family for three generations. When he died in 2019, as well as the piano she inherited another legacy – a collection of cassette tapes recording her grandfather Stephen de Bastion, the piano's previous owner, narrating his life story, along with written accounts, memorabilia and photographs. In *The Piano Player of Budapest*, de Bastion has harnessed all of this diverse material to recreate Stephen's story in a vivid narrative, in addition to describing her own experiences uncovering it several decades later.

Stephen was born Istvan Holtzer, the eldest son of a wealthy Jewish family in Hungary. He became a successful musician, playing popular songs on the piano in the clubs and restaurants of 1930s Budapest, and composing his own songs and film scores. But in 1942 Hungary's far-right government, allied with Germany, began conscripting Jewish men to provide forced labour for the Hungarian Army on the Russian Front. Stephen endured working in brutal conditions.

When the Hungarian Army was defeated he fled, completing an arduous journey on foot as far as Kyiv, where he found an army train to take him back to Budapest. However, when Germany invaded Hungary in 1944, he was sent to Mauthausen concentration camp. Stephen survived the horrors there, managing to last until the camp was liberated at the end of the war, but many did not.

As the last survivors of the Holocaust die out, their descendants are increasingly taking on the duty of telling their stories. This book is an important and timely reminder of what totalitarianism and hatred lead to.

ROSEMARY COLLINS **is the features editor of *WDYTYA? Magazine***

AMANDA ROSE / THE DE BASTION FAMILY

## DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

PODCAST

### Was Justice Served?

**Podcast services**

In this new podcast from genealogical records website Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk/was-justice-served**), research expert Jen Baldwin, criminologist David Wilson and historian David Olusoga examine five murder cases from British history. Using the site's extensive collection of historic newspapers, they find out what happened and ask – who was guilty?

LISTEN

### The Essay: Dig Where You Stand

**tinyurl.com/bbc-essay-dig-where-you-stand**

In this five-part series from BBC Radio 3's *The Essay*, a range of presenters revisit traditional British folk songs from the archives, and return to the places where they were first recorded to discuss what folk music tells us about our history. Their journeys take them to Arbroath, Arnisdale, Ceredigion, St Mawgan and the Yarrow Valley.

WEBSITE

### Biographical Dictionary Of Nurses From Ireland During The Second World War

**tinyurl.com/nidirect-nurses**

The Royal College of Nursing Northern Ireland and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland have compiled this dictionary of all known nurses from the island of Ireland who served during the Second World War. It includes key dates and other valuable details, making it a great resource.

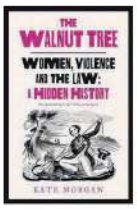
WELLCOME LIBRARY/CREATIVE COMMONS

# The Walnut Tree Women, Violence And The Law: A Hidden History

WOMEN'S HISTORY

**Kate Morgan**

*Mudlark, 320 pages, £20*




The title of solicitor-turned-writer Kate Morgan's second book is drawn from the proverb, "A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the more they are beaten, the better they'll be." It reflects not only attitudes towards women in the past, but also demonstrates their inferior legal status, where they were deemed to be the property of men (whether their husbands, fathers or employers), and were therefore told to obey their male 'master' or face punishment.

Women's lives at the hands of men might be subject to violence, but their efforts to gain redress through the courts could be stymied by a legal system that was full of double standards – one that subjected women to invasive questioning and made negative assumptions about their behaviour, frequently blaming the victim.

In *The Walnut Tree*, Morgan blends legal, criminal and social history to detail what our female ancestors' lives were like, and the challenges that they faced from this flawed legal system. Focusing largely on the Victorian and Edwardian eras, case studies are utilised to show how laws had repercussions on real women. The result of her hard work is a very readable and accessible book – one that helps us to understand our female forebears and how the law could prevent them from living the lives that they deserved.

**Dr Nell Darby is a crime historian and journalist who has written extensively about women and crime in Britain**

## Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

# Who Were The Real Oliver Twists? Childhood Poverty In Victorian London

SOCIAL HISTORY

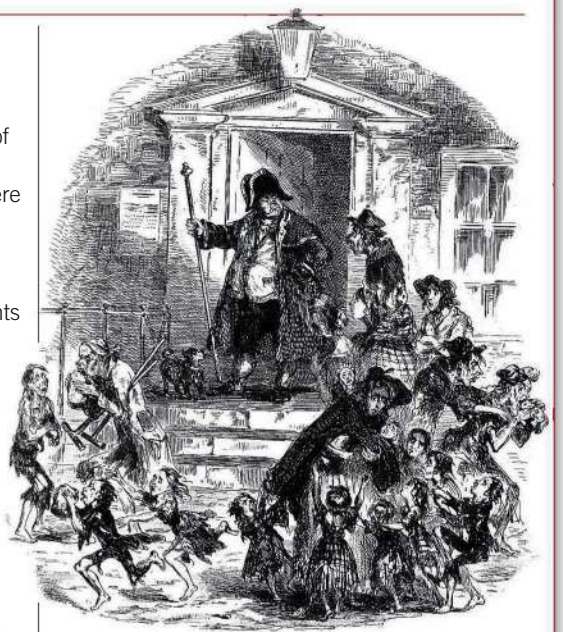
**Lynn Hamilton**, *Pen & Sword, 232 pages, £22*

Most of us are familiar with Charles Dickens' tale of Oliver Twist. Lynn Hamilton's book graphically depicts the reality of life for many Victorian children and the hardships that they were forced to endure.

It includes the story of Dickens himself, who worked in a blacking factory from the age of 12 after his father went bankrupt. Hamilton recounts real-life stories of some who endured awful childhoods – babies placed into baby farms by single mothers, some of whom then died from malnutrition; young children trafficked from workhouses to factories; terrible prison sentences and transportation from a very young age; child chimney sweeps; and children who were tricked into prostitution.

On a lighter note, also mentioned are those who endeavoured to change Victorian perspectives on childhood and the treatment of the working class by introducing ragged schools, as well as the introduction of legislation on working conditions for young adults.

*Who Were the Real Oliver Twists?* also reminds us that some children today still face the same struggles as our Victorian ancestors.



Children and adults alike receive grudging charity from a workhouse in this etching by Dickens' illustrator 'Phiz'

**Lisa Paines, Bath**

**Lisa started researching her family in 2007, and has found it to be a fascinating journey**

**Join Us... Send us an email if you'd like to join our reviewing panel e *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk***

# TV & RADIO

**Jonathan Wright** previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

## Who Do You Think You Are?

**BBC One and BBC iPlayer**
**Wednesday 14 August (to be confirmed)**

Actor Vicky McClure kicks off the new series of *Who Do You Think You Are?* in style, and uncovers a harrowing story from the Second World War involving her great grandfather

It always seems like the longest wait, but *WDYTYA?* is back for its 21st series. As ever, we can expect family stories of celebrities primarily drawn from across the worlds of showbusiness and sport, and episodes that provide fascinating insights into not only those who take part, but also genealogical research and our shared social history.

The first episode features actor Vicky McClure of *Line of Duty* fame – by her own estimation, "a homebody" who's not even sure that taking part in *WDYTYA?* is such a good idea. "I don't like the unknown, that's my problem," she says. There's a certain irony then in Vicky racking up the air miles to trace the story of her great grandfather Harry, who was captured by the Japanese in Singapore during the Second World War.

*EastEnders* and *Strictly Come Dancing* favourite Rose Ayling-Ellis stars in the fourth episode

The family story is that Harry died as a prisoner of war in Japan, but the truth is a little different, although no less tragic, as Vicky learns when she travels to Taiwan and visits a disused copper mine.

The series continues with Paddy McGuinness, who starts out knowing little about his family history. This changes as the presenter and comedian works his way back through stories from past generations to learn how the McGuinnesses left Ballina, Ireland, for his hometown of Bolton.

Mel C's research is focused on Liverpool. The singer–songwriter and former Spice Girl wants to explore her family's deep connections in the city. A money lender, the Irish famine and a campaigner who grew up in a workhouse all feature.

The research of actor and deaf-rights campaigner Rose Ayling-Ellis takes her to rural Devon. The area was home to her 4x great grandfather, but only after he made his way to the West Country from Italy, travelling from town to town selling jewellery.

We will preview the final three episodes of the new series next issue.

### Britain Behind Bars: A Secret History

**Channel 4**
**Streaming now**

With his background as a criminal barrister and his ability to connect with those he meets as a documentary-maker investigating the past, it's difficult to think of a better person than former *WDYTYA?* star Rob Rinder to present a series about the history of Britain's prisons and prisoners.

The first episode gives a good idea of what to expect, as Rob pays a visit to windswept HMP Dartmoor in Devon. Here, the stories of the past he learns about include the tale of a prisoner so angry at his mistreatment that he broke *into* the jail with the intention of killing a warden. It's an anecdote that brings one of the episode's central questions into focus: what happens when those in charge push prisoners to the absolute limit?

The programme features interviews with former prisoners who compare their experiences to those who went before.

### Great Lives

**BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds**
**Continuing from Monday 19 August**

For anyone fascinated by tales of historical figures, *Great Lives* is an absolute treat. The format is deceptively simple. People in the public eye select people from the past that they admire, who they discuss – and sometimes find themselves defending against criticism – in the company of host Matthew Parris and an expert guest. Shows in the latest run include actor Miriam Margolyes on Charles Dickens, comedian Jo Brand on blues singer Bessie Smith and film director Julian Temple on Christopher Marlowe.

A huge archive of previous shows is on BBC Sounds.

### Long Lost Family

**ITV**
**Continuing from Monday 19 August**

It seems we may have been a little premature last issue in assuming that there were no new episodes of *LLF* in the pipeline. Such are the pitfalls of going to press ahead of the transmission dates of shows being announced. In fact, the 14th series is continuing over the summer, with co-presenters Davina McCall, Nicky Campbell and the team returning to help more people who are longing to connect with biological mothers, fathers and siblings they have yet to meet.

The episode broadcast on 19 August follows two especially poignant stories. The first features 66-year-old grandmother Charlotte who, spurred into action by a health scare, wants to find the child she gave up for adoption as a teen. She has long cherished a photo of her daughter as an eight-month-old baby. Could they be reunited half a century later?

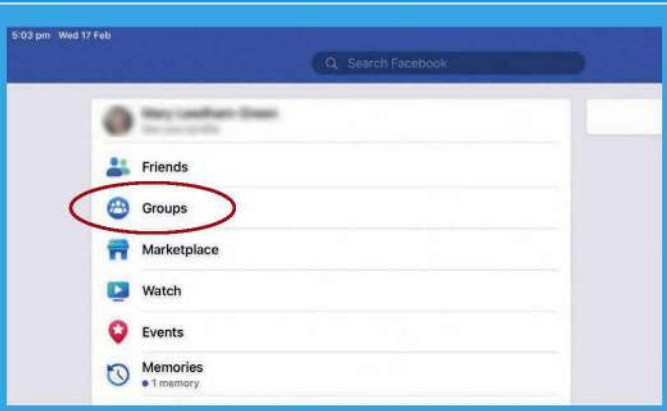
The second story follows 40-year-old Jenna, who was conceived with the help of a sperm donor: "Unless you are donor conceived, then you don't fully understand the impact. I just really want to know where I came from." Since donors were guaranteed anonymity in the past, the researchers begin by uploading her DNA to a database.

BBC/WALL TO WALL MEDIA

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

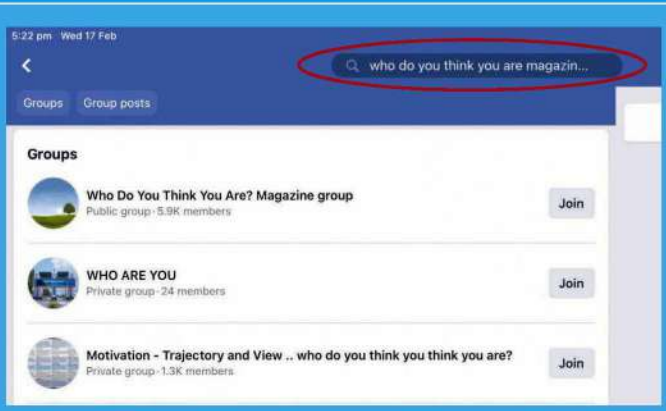
# Join Our FACEBOOK GROUP

Did you know that we have a friendly Facebook Group where family historians can share new discoveries, ask for help or just chat about genealogy? If you haven't joined a Facebook Group before, don't worry, it's very simple!




## 1 Click On The 'Groups' Icon

From the Facebook homepage, click on the 'Groups' icon (this may be at the bottom of the screen on the mobile app or from the menu, or above your News Feed).

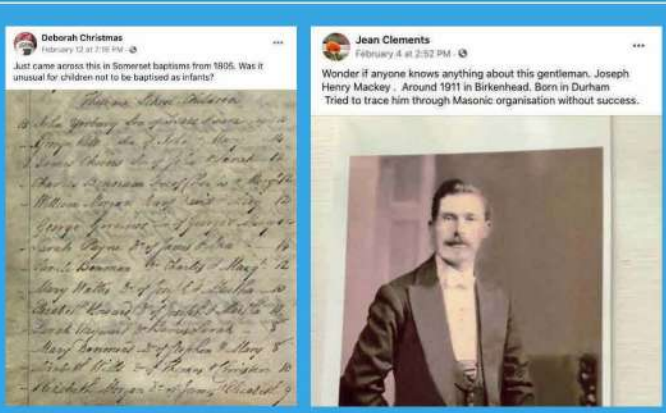



## 2 Search For Our Group

Search for the *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine* Group (click the magnifying glass), then click 'Join' next to the name. You will need to read and agree to our rules.

## 3 Wait To Be Added

We are then notified, and will add you as a member as soon as possible. The group is growing rapidly, but you shouldn't have to wait too long before you're approved.




## 4 Start Posting!

You can either upload your own query or respond to other people's posts. It's a great way to share your love of family history and get help with your brick walls.

# NEXT MONTH

Our October issue goes on sale on **10 September**

## ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET... GO!

*WDYTYA?* genealogist Laura Berry shares her expert advice for starting a winning family tree

**ALL ABOUT THAT PLACE**
Tips from the event

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The dangerous lives of railway workers

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# 'Mabel Defied The Gestapo'

CELEBRATING YOUR DISCOVERIES

Eddie Wulff's grandmother showed her indomitable courage during the bombing of Hamburg and her resistance to the Nazis. By **Gail Dixon**

Eddie's paternal grandmother Mabel Wulff with her German-born husband Max

The first time I became aware of my grandmother Mabel was when Adolf Hitler dropped through the letterbox," says Eddie Wulff. "She lived in Hamburg, northern Germany, and sent letters to us in Newport, South Wales. Germany was in such a mess after the war that they still used postage stamps bearing Hitler's likeness.

"I met Mabel in 1952 when she visited Wales on holiday. She was a formidable woman, and we got on straight away."

Mabel Amelia Phillips was born in 1887 in Newport, and her father was a mariner. She worked as a seamstress and volunteered at the town's branch of the Christian welfare charity The Mission to Seamen (now The Mission to Seafarers), which is where she met her future husband Max Wulff.

Max was a native of Hamburg who joined the Merchant Navy, and stayed on in Newport to run a café. They married in 1909 and had two sons – Eddie's father Edward, and Leonard.

The First World War turned their lives upside down. "Max was interned as an enemy alien, and spent four years in camps in Lancaster and mainly the Isle of Man isolated from his family."

After the war ended Max was forcibly repatriated to Germany. He returned to Hamburg, where Mabel and the children joined him c1920/1921. He worked on the docks, and Mabel became caretaker of the Anglican Church of St Thomas à Becket. They lived in a flat attached to the church, a grand neoclassical building.

As tensions grew between Britain and Germany in the 1930s Edward returned to Britain and later joined the Royal Navy. Sadly, Leonard died of suspected meningitis when he was 21.

"A branch of the British Legion was established in Hamburg in 1934, and its flag was flown in the church. Knowing that the Gestapo would be angered by such a symbol, Mabel hid it under a step by the altar.

"The Gestapo paid Mabel numerous visits, and strutted around interrogating her about the flag. She refused to tell them where it was, and they even walked over it a few times. Mabel had other valuables hidden safely, including a copy of Raphael's painting the *Sistine Madonna*."

**The Gestapo paid Mabel numerous visits, and strutted around interrogating her**

Services were banned during the war, and the church was closed. The Nazis used it as a warehouse to store straw and horse fodder.

In 1943, the Royal Air Force bombed Hamburg heavily, and an estimated 44,600 civilians lost their lives.

"Several bombs fell on the church and fire broke out, but Mabel rushed to put it out using blankets. The church would have been lost otherwise.

"There were many homeless people living in Hamburg after the bombing, so Mabel provided shelter for 60 civilians in the church. The Gestapo discovered this, and turned them out."

As Allied tanks rolled into Hamburg in spring 1945, Mabel decided to hang a large Union Jack out of her window.

"A patrol of South Wales Borderers passed by, and recognised her accent. Mabel put the kettle on, and the soldiers provided the tea because there was none to be had in Germany. I still have her Union Jack from that day. It's a prized possession."

In 1956, Mabel's courage was honoured when she was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for meritorious civil service. She received the accolade at the British Embassy in Bonn.

Mabel worked at the church for over 40 years, and her efforts were greatly appreciated by the church council. Max died in 1964, so she retired to Newport to be close to her family. She passed away in 1978 at the age of 90.

"In 2019, it was my pleasure to visit the church in Hamburg and unveil a commemorative plaque to Mabel," Eddie reveals. "I'm so proud of the fact that she sheltered homeless German families. We were at war with them, but that didn't stop her helping people."

**EDDIE WULFF** is a retired businessman who lives in Newport, South Wales. He has been researching his family tree for five years

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**Share your family hero with us and they could appear in the magazine!**

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Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

• *WDYTYA? Magazine* would like to thank historian Andrew Hemmings for bringing Mabel's story to our attention. Andrew has written about her for the Imperial War Museums' website: **tinyurl.com/iwm-mab**.

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